ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: BUILDING PRODUCTIVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS WITH BLACK MALE ADOLESCENTS

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Teachers often struggle to initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students, which can have detrimental effects on Black male students' academic and personal development. Therefore, teacher education and professional development programs as well as K-12 school administrators need to prepare and support all teachers in developing productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students. The purpose of this collective case study was to identify the practices teachers use to build productive relationships with their Black male students and explore how the dimensions of a teacher's identity influence their enactment of those practices. This study took place in a racially and socio-economically diverse all-boys parochial high school and focused on the relational practices of three teachers, who students identified as consistently building productive relationships with Black male students.

The findings highlight five common practices the focal teachers used to build relationships with their Black male students: a) interacting with student in a humanizing manner; b) engaging in conversations about race with students; c) engaging students as active participants in their own learning; d) preparing students for short and long term success; and e) being consistently present in the students' school lives. Each teacher also enacted unique practices including being transparent with students, mentoring students, treating students with unconditional positive regard, prioritizing student growth, and allowing opportunities for redemption. Additionally, the findings suggest that a teacher's race, gender, instructional role, and life experience influence their ability to develop productive relationships with Black male adolescents.

This work emphasizes that teacher education programs and K-12 schools need to support teachers in building productive relationships with Black male students regardless of a school's racial composition. Furthermore, this work emphasizes that teacher education programs should provide future teachers with multiple visions of how they can enact effective relational practices and should address how and why the teachers may need to modify their practice based on dimensions of their identity, particularly their race and instructional role. Finally, this work supports the need for K-12 schools to adopt policies that facilitate and support teachers' formation of productive relationships with their Black male students.

BUILDING PRODUCTIVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS WITH BLACK MALE ADOLESCENTS

By

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Chapter One: Introduction

When I think back on the eleven years I spent in the middle school classroom, the moments that have stayed with me do not center around a lesson I delivered, an assignment I designed, or how my students performed on standardized tests. Instead, they center on the interactions I had with my students and the lasting relationships that I developed with many of them. Through my experience teaching in a middle school that served primarily Black boys, I learned that no matter how well you know your subject, if you can't build relationships with students, opportunities for learning are lost.

Statement of Problem

Unfortunately, many teacher education and professional development programs primarily focus on enhancing teachers' content knowledge and instructional practices, while often neglecting the development of teachers' relational practices (Konjufu, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Milner, 2015; Murrell, 2001; Toste, 2012). The current emphasis in U.S. schools on standardized test performance prioritizes outputs over inputs without acknowledging the influence that certain inputs, such as teachers' relational practices, can have on student outcomes (Milner, 2015; Rodriguez, 2008). As a result, teachers often do not understand how their relationships with students influences student learning, and many teachers struggle to initiate and maintain productive relationship with students, especially Black male adolescents (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010; Milner, 2015; Sleeter, 2008; Wilson, 2016).

Schools of education, school systems, and policy makers need to put more emphasis on developing teachers' relational practices and cultural competence especially because productive student-teacher relationships can be a lever for addressing the racial achievement gap. Previous research suggests productive student-teacher relationships

may prove critical to Black male students' school persistence, social emotional well-being, and academic achievement (Brockenbrough, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Harper et al., 2014; Howard, 2014; Milner, 2011; Warren, 2013). Therefore, it is essential that all teachers be prepared to and supported in building authentic relationships with their Black male students.

Positive student-teacher interactions both inside and outside the classroom can lead to productive student-teacher relationships. These relationships can result in a variety of academic and socio-emotional gains for students such as increases in GPA, school attendance, and students' sense of self-efficacy (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair & Lehr, 2004; Davis; 2003; Ellerbrock, Kiefer, & Alley, 2014; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Milner; 2015; Noam & Fiore, 2004; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Reichert & Hawley; 2014; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Additionally, these relationships can serve as protective factors minimizing school leaving, especially during the middle and high school years (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Davis & Dupper, 2004; Decker, Dona, & Christenson 2007; Murray, Kosty, & Hauser-McClean, 2016). However, the quality of student-teacher relationships often varies based on the race and gender of the student, and researchers have found that teachers are least likely to engage in productive relationships with their Black male students (Canton, 2012; Howard, 2014; Love, 2013; Sleeter, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Wilson; 2016).

Historically, Black males have been positioned as inferior within U.S. society (Canton, 2012; Perry, 2003). The media as well as social and political discourse perpetuate this presumption of inferiority by promoting an image of Black male youth that claims they "are scary, they're violent, they're apathetic, aggressive, not smart, not

capable, not beautiful, not loving, not capable of being loved" (Washington, 2018, p.158). The media's depiction of Black male youth ultimately limits their opportunities in multiple arenas of U.S. society including school (Canton, 2012; Howard, 2014; Little, 2018; Lynn et al., 2010; Milner, 2015; Washington, 2018). Teachers' views of their Black male students are often influenced by these stereotypical representations of Black male adolescents, and as a result, teachers often interact with their Black male students through a lens of fear or pity (Dance, 2012; Davis, 2009, Duncan, 2002; Flennaugh, 2017; Milner, 2015; Noguera, 2008; Warren, 2013; Woodward, 2018).

Due to this unjustified sense of fear, many teachers, particularly secondary school teachers, default to asserting their authority in an attempt to control and manage their Black male students (Canton, 2012; Davis & Dupper, 2004; Decker et al., 2007; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Love, 2013; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Milner, 2015; Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999; Rojas & Liou, 2017, Watson, 2018). Teachers' negative interactions with Black male youth can have devastating results. Within the U.S., teachers' removal of Black male adolescents from their classrooms and their referral to administrators based on minor offenses contribute to this group of students being disproportionality and unjustly disciplined, suspended, and expelled (Canton, 2012; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008; Michael, Moore, & Penick-Parks, 2018). In other instances teachers' fear can cause them to ignore and educationally neglect their Black male students (Allen, 2010; Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2014; Irvine, 2003; Lynn et al., 2010, Noguera, 2008). Even when teachers claim to care about Black male youth, they often express only sentimental care that is driven from a place of pity and results in teachers lowering their expectations for Black male students (Gay, 2000). Therefore, for

many Black male youth, schools become sites of social reproduction that limit their opportunities in both school and society (Bartolomé, 1994; Canton, 2012; Duncan, 2002; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Nieto, 2010).

Although many Black male youth experience regular negative interactions with teachers (Brockenbrough, 2014; Canton, 2012; Lynn et al., 2010; Love, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Wilson, 2016), they are more likely to engage in the curriculum when they feel they have an authentic relationships with their teachers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2002; Irvine, 2009; Konjufu, 2018; Nieto, 2010; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Rodriguez, 2014). To both address the achievement gap and make schools a welcoming place for Black male adolescents, all teachers must take intentional steps to build productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students, regardless of the number of Black male youth they teach.

Purpose of Study

Previous research has established the importance of productive student-teacher relationships particularly for the success of students of color. However, many of these studies broadly explore the experiences of all students of color or of students within a certain racial demographic without considering the intersecting nature that both race and gender play in students' relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, the majority of studies that focus specifically on teachers' interactions and relationships with Black male adolescents are situated within urban schools where the student bodies primarily consist of students of color from low income backgrounds (see Appendix A). Fewer studies have examined how teachers in more racially and socio-economically diverse schools build relationships with their Black male students, yet prior research suggests Black male

adolescents experience antagonistic relationships with teachers and lower levels of academic achievement regardless of their socio-economic status or the demographics of the school they attend (Allen, 2010; Diamond, 2006; Gordon, 2012; Gosa & Alexander, 2007). In fact, teacher bias may be more pronounced in more diverse spaces where Black students are regularly compared to their White peers or have their White peers' needs prioritized over their own (Allen, 2010). Thus, it is important to study how teachers form relationships with Black male youth in a variety of school contexts.

Additionally, previous studies that address teachers' relationships with Black male students tend to focus on teachers that are representative of only one race and/or gender (particularly Black females, Black males, and White females; see Appendix A). These studies often imply that the strategies they outline for building and maintaining relationships with Black male adolescents can be authentically replicated by teachers from varying demographic backgrounds. However, they rarely address the ways these practices should or can be modified when they are implemented by teachers from different racial and gendered backgrounds. In addition, only a few of these studies have included White male teacher participants (see Appendix A). As a result, less is known about how they build relationship with Black male students. Finally, few studies consider the impact teachers' institutional roles or the content areas they teach have on the way they approach relationships with their Black male students.

Therefore, in this study I describe the relational practices of three demographically diverse teachers (a White female, a White male, and a Black male) in a racially and socio-economically diverse Catholic high school. I identify the strategies they employ and the attitudes they adopt in order to effectively initiate and maintain

productive relationships with their Black male students. I not only identify the common relational techniques the teachers employ, but I also provide a more nuanced view of how the different dimensions of the teachers' personal identities specifically their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role influence the manner in which they approach their relationship with Black male students. I specifically address the following research questions:

1) How do teachers at a racially and socio-economically diverse high school initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students?

2) How does a teacher's identity – particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role – influence the ways they initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students?

Significance of Study

The ultimate goal of this study is a) to identify and describe practices teachers can enact to develop productive relationships with their Black male students regardless of the demographics of the school community, and b) to provide varied descriptions of individual teacher's approaches to those practices. By providing multiple visions of how each practice can be enacted, I hope to demonstrate that for a teacher to authentically and effectively enact relational practices they cannot simply replicate practices that are successful for another teacher, especially if they do not share the same social and institutional background as that teacher. Instead they must modify the practice in recognition of their own personal identity. Accordingly, this work has the potential to influence how teacher education programs and school administrators prepare and support

teachers as they build their capacity to form productive relationships with their Black male students.

Key Terms

In this section, I briefly explain both how and why I have chosen to use certain key terms throughout this paper.

Black male students.

I use the term Black male students to reference the student population that is the focus of this study. I chose to use the term Black rather than African American because the students who were interviewed indicated that they either used Black and African American interchangeably or indicated that they more frequently self-identified as Black to acknowledge that they were not strictly of African descent but also had roots in the Caribbean and other areas. In the original proposal for this study, I used the term "Black boys" to describe my student participants and their peers. However, during the recruitment phase of the study I had a conversation with one of my focal teachers, Mr. Nelson, who was the only Black teacher included in the study, and he suggested I re-think the use of "Black boy" given the historical significance of the term as a way to disrespect and demean Black men. Given both his insight and the fact that many of my participants ended up being seniors who were either already or soon to be legal adults, I decided to change the term. I contemplated using the term young Black men, but I did not want to adultify the student participants who were sophomores and still several years away from legal adulthood. Thus, to refer to this population as a whole I have chosen the term Black male students, which I use interchangeably with the term Black male youth and Black male adolescents.

Teacher.

In this study, I broadly define the term teacher to refer to anyone working within a school whose primary role is to educate students and support their academic success through primary or supplemental instruction. Thus, the term teacher as used in this study encompasses both classroom instructors and academic support staff, who work with individual students to provide general or assignment specific academic support on either a regular or an as needed basis.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework & Review of Literature

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in a conceptual framework that explains the interplay of three embedded concepts that function collectively to describe how teachers initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students: teacher identity, a praxis of politicized care, and working alliance theory (see Figure 1). In the framework, I define a productive relationship as a working alliance between the teacher and the student that consists of an interpersonal bond, common task, and common goal. I then suggest that for teachers to initiate and maintain working alliances with their Black male students they must consistently demonstrate a praxis of politicized care that takes into consideration the specific care-base needs of their Black male students. Finally, I propose that how individual teachers enact a praxis of politicize care for and establish a working alliance with their Black male students is influenced by dimensions of their identity, particularly race, gender, life experience, and institutional role.

The outer layer of the framework represents the working alliance. It encompasses the three components of working alliance theory: an interpersonal bond, a common task and a common goal (Rogers, 2009). When applied to the field of education, working alliance theory suggests that the relationship between a teacher and student is not simply dyadic but triadic – student, teacher, and subject (Reichert & Hawley, 2014). Thus, a working alliance calls "not only for emotional connection but also collaboration" (Toste, 2012, p.28) and should ultimately facilitate positive student outcomes. While both the teacher and student contribute to the working alliance, the teacher is the relational manager and as such must monitor and address tension in the alliance to ensure the

student's needs are met and that students ultimately make progress towards their goals (Rogers, 2009).

While working alliance theory clearly outlines the necessary components of a productive student-teacher relationship, it does not provide a clear vision for how teachers can work with students to establish each component of the alliance. Therefore, the middle layer of the framework suggests that for a teacher to initiate and maintain a working alliance with Black male students they must adopt practices and mindsets that align with a praxis of politicized care.

For many Black male students, before they can fully engage in the learning process, they must feel that their teacher is invested in their academic and personal development (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2002; Irvine, 2009; Konjufu, 2018). Thus, teachers must consider and continually address the care-based needs of their Black male students to establish the trust necessary for a positive interpersonal bond. Once this initial trust has been established, the teacher and student can work collaboratively to make progress towards the student's goals. For Black male students, these goals should ensure that students are prepared for future success not only as students but also as Black men in America. The latter aspect of this is a tall order, and includes helping students to develop racial pride and an understanding of their history and heritage as well as an ability to both navigate and cope within a race-conscious and discriminatory society (Brooms, 2017; Cross, Strauss, & Fhagen-Smith, 1999; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Flennaugh, 2017; Milner, 2009; Walker & Tompkins, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

Finally, at the center of the framework is the teacher's identity. The teacher's identity influences the way they demonstrate politicized care for Black male youth and can also impact the overall progression and maintenance of the working alliance. Dimensions of the teacher's identity such as race, gender, and life experience can inform the assumptions the teacher makes about Black male adolescents, the degree of empathy they have for their Black male students, and the extent to which they can relate to Black male youths' lived experiences. Additionally, a teacher's race and gender may influence Black male students' initial perception of the teacher and may hinder or facilitate the preliminary formation of an interpersonal bond (Fergus et al., 2014; Hunter & Stinson, 2019). Finally, in order for a teacher to demonstrate politicized care for Black male students in a way that is authentic, the teacher must modify certain practices to account for how the societal meanings ascribed to their race and gender as well as the expectations of their institutional role position them in relation to their Black male students. As such, a teacher's identity influences their overall approach to enacting politicized care with Black male adolescents as they work to establish and maintain a working alliance.

In the next section, I more thoroughly explain each of the three major concepts (working alliance theory, a praxis of politicized care, and teacher identity) that theoretically underpin this study and conclude with a summary of how they inform one another.

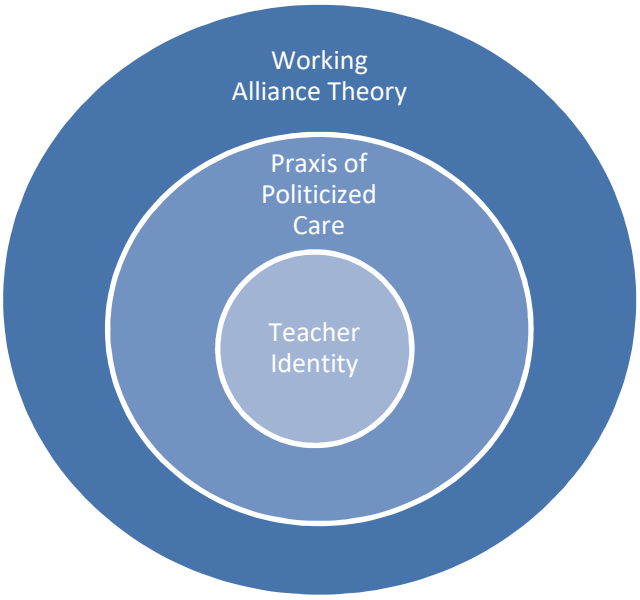

Figure 1: Conceptual framework describing how teachers initiate and maintain relationships with Black male students

Working alliance theory.

Students and teachers can have positive relationships that are not productive: they may form an interpersonal bond based on common interests and mutual affinity, but that bond does not necessarily contribute to students' academic or personal development. Thus, for this study, I define a productive student-teacher relationship based on working alliance theory. Originally applied to the therapeutic relationships in psychology, working alliance theory focuses on the change process and how it is impacted by interaction and collaboration with others (Rogers, 2009). The "alliance refers to the quality and strength of the collaborative relationship" (Toste, Heath, Connor, & Pend, 2015, p. 32) and consists of three components: 1) an interpersonal bond, 2) a common task, and 3) a common goal. Within the therapeutic context, the existence of a strong working alliance has been found to be an effective predictor of positive patient outcomes (Roger, 2009; Toste et al., 2015).

In recent years, working alliance theory has been adapted for the field of education as a means to better understand the components of an effective student-teacher relationship. For a strong working alliance to develop between a teacher and student, they must establish an interpersonal bond built on trust, respect, and care (Toste et al., 2015). The teacher must then build upon this bond by working collaboratively with students in the classroom and employing pedagogical techniques that make classroom tasks relevant for students. Ultimately, these shared tasks should support students as they progress towards learning outcomes that are meaningful to the individual student and support their future success (Rogers, 2009). In the classroom context, "teachers serve as agents of changes, students as those seeking to grow, and mastery of subject or skill as the objective" (Reichert, 2015, p.45). Thus, the working alliance between a teacher and student is ultimately a "triadic relationship –boy, teacher, subject matter" that is reliant on both "a positive dyadic relationship" between the boy and teacher and also on "a teacher's subject matter and pedagogical mastery" (Reichert & Hawley, 2014, p.29).

In order for the working alliance to function, both the student and teacher need to be invested in the relationship and view the relationship as a collaborative partnership (Rogers, 2009; Toste et al., 2015). However, as the adult in the relationship, the teacher must act as the relational manager: "1) serving as the expert who will facilitate change in the student, 2) being aware of the working alliance and its potential role in the change process, and 3) being responsible for monitoring and addressing strains in the working alliance"(Rogers, 2009, p.4). The teacher is ultimately responsible for initiating the relationship and maintaining the quality of the relationships, so that a student can achieve their learning goals.

Despite the common elements that must be present in all working alliances, the ways in which teachers establish and maintain this alliance may vary based on the role of the teacher and the positioning of both the teacher and student in the instructional context. Rogers (2009) explains, "Variations in the bond occur as a product of the specific learning context and the unique characteristics of the student and teachers brought to bear in context" (p.4). Thus, while the "underlying goals of learning remains the same" and the three component parts (bond, common task, and common goal) are present in each working alliance, the alliance can shift given the particular context of the relationship. In some cases, one of the three components (bond, task, or goal) may receive greater attention and emphasis in order to meet the needs of the student within the given context (Rogers, 2009). I suggest that when building working alliances with Black male students, teachers must initially emphasize the interpersonal bond, which should be established through a praxis of politicized care.

Praxis of politicized care.

To care and be cared for is a fundamental human need. Therefore, care provides the foundation for all interpersonal bonds including positive student-teacher relationships (Muller, 2001). According to Noddings (2013), teachers must adopt an ethic of care that is "reactive," "responsive," and "receptive" (p.19) to the needs of their students. As the caregivers, teachers must initiate and demonstrate care for the student, but in order for that care to be beneficial to the relationship, students must perceive, accept, and respond to the teachers' care. In this way, Noddings (2013) conceptualizes care not as a set of behaviors but rather as a form of relational knowing. This type of care, authentic care, requires that care-givers take action toward the cared-for that is informed by the situation

and the cared-for's individual needs. To authentically care, the care-givers must step out of their personal frame of reference and consider the point of view and needs of the cared-for (Kang, 2006; Noddings, 2013). Authentic care must ultimately be rooted in a reciprocal relationship based on trust (Shiller, 2009). In an educational context, authentic care requires teachers to care for their students as holistic beings and to see them not only as students but as people (McHugh, Horner, Colditz & Wallace, 2013; Parsons, 2005; Shiller, 2009).

Scholars of color have argued that the concept of care must move beyond authentic care (Rolon-Dow, 2005) and incorporate a political component which examines the roles of power, race, and socio-political realities that are inherent in the caring relationship (Antrop-Gonzalez & de Jesus, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rolon-Dow, 2005; Toshalis, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore they emphasize that any expression of teacher care for students of color must "acknowledge that race does make a difference in the realities that are experienced in everyday life" (Roberts, 2010, p.458) and must go beyond general positive feelings toward students of color to also include active support of students' future success (Roberts, 2010). This more politicized version of care for students of color has been framed as culturally relevant care (Parsons, 2005, Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016), warm demander pedagogy (Ware, 2006), critical care (Antrop-Gonzalez & de Jesus, 2006), identity-centered multicultural care (Kang, 2006), culturally relevant critical care (Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; Roberts, 2010), and politicized womanist care (Watson, 2018).

Watson (2018) draws on these other culturally relevant conceptualizations of care as well as the long-standing praxis of Black feminist educators to operationalize a

definition for a praxis of politicized womanist care. She argues this praxis of politicized care should be grounded in "a) soulful and politicized purpose driven high expectations for students, b) building relationships through vulnerability, encouragement, communication, and recognition, and c) redefining success and envisioning paths for the future" (Watson, 2018, p.369).

Within the conceptual framework for this study, I draw upon all three elements of Watson's (2018) praxis of politicized care, but pay particular attention to the way care is enacted through the four practices Watson identified as essential to building and maintaining relationship with students of color: vulnerability, encouragement, communication, and recognition. According to Watson (2018), vulnerability requires teachers to recognize that they may not fully know a student or understand where that student is coming from; therefore, they must approach relationship with students of color from "a listening and learning stance" (p.374). Second, encouragement requires that teachers acknowledge the sociopolitical challenges and barriers their students may face while at the same time not lowering their expectations for students based on those barriers. Instead teachers should enact "stern encouragement" (p.371) where they couple high expectations for their students with consistent emotional and academic support. Third, communication refers to teachers actively engaging with students in open dialogue, so they can get to know them both as students and as people. Additionally, teachers should provide opportunities for meaningful conversation within the classroom to establish a sense of community amongst students. Finally recognition necessitates that teachers recognize their students' humanities, the assets they bring to the classroom, and their capacity to succeed.

In the conceptual framework I draw upon for this study, a teacher must adopt a praxis of politicized care and embody these four relational practices in their daily interactions with their Black male students in order to lay the foundation for a working alliance with Black male students and to maintain a working alliance once it has been established.

Teacher identity.

Identity is a complex term that can be defined in a multitude of ways. Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith (2012) define identity as "the traits, characteristics and social relations, roles, and social group membership that define who one is" (p.69). Their definition illustrates the complexity of identity as both a personal and social construction; identity is not only how an individual perceives themselves but also how they are perceived by others. Gardenswartz & Rowe's (1994) four layers of diversity model (see Figure 2) provides a useful framework for considering the different overlapping dimensions of identity that are both personally and socially defined. They describe four layers of individual identity: personality, internal dimensions such as race, external dimensions such as educational background, and organizational dimensions such as department; each of these factors positions an individual in relation to others and creates the filter through which they initially perceive others and are perceived by others. Although the authors designed the four layers of diversity model as a workforce development initiative to support work place diversity trainings, I argue that the overarching structure of their model also provides a useful overview of the different dimensions of teachers' identity that influence teachers' interactions and relationships with their students.

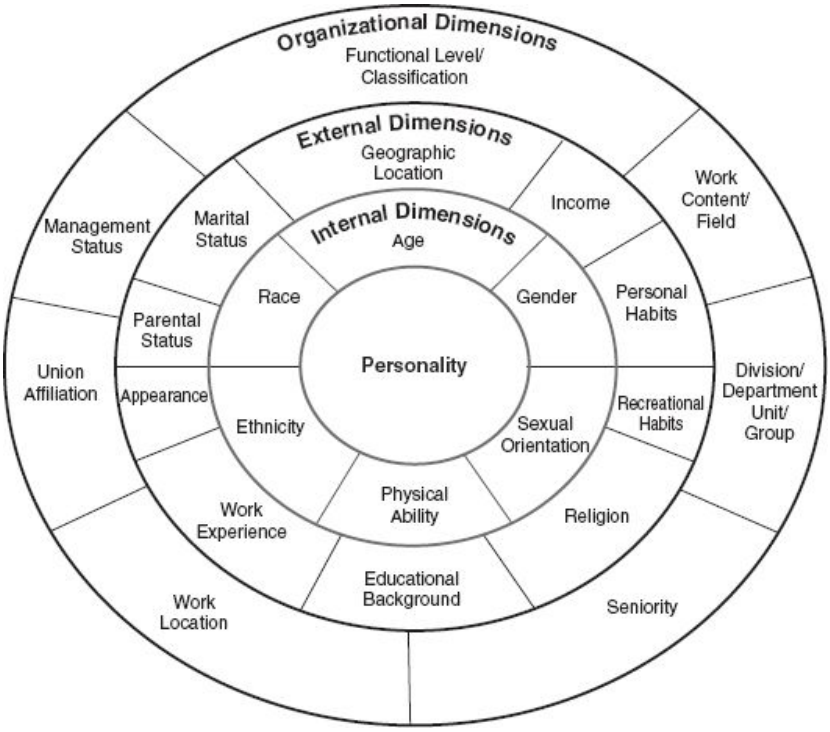

Figure 2: Four Layers of Diversity Model (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994)

In the framework drawn on for this study, I focus on specific components within the outer three layers of the Gardenswartz & Rowe (1994) model to consider how certain aspects of a teacher's identity influence their approach when initiating and maintaining relationships with their Black male students. I first focus on the internal dimensions of race and gender. I then consider the external dimensions or life experiences, especially those that have informed the teachers' worldview and influenced their sense of self-efficacy, cultural awareness, and empathy for others. Finally, I address the organizational dimension, thinking specifically about how the teachers' role at the school influences their relationships with students. I suggest that each of these dimensions of identity intersect to influence the manner in which individual teachers approach relationships with their Black male students. When I reference teacher identity throughout the rest of this

study, I refer to these four dimensions (race, gender, life experiences, and institutional role) as they are described below.

Race & gender. Race and gender are some of the more visible aspects of individual identity and are frequently used to categorize or label people, both positively and negatively (Arredondo et al, 1996). Although race and gender may be seemingly visible aspects of identity, it is their social meaning that defines their significance in social interaction. In reference to race, gender, and class, Andersen and Hill Collins (2007) claim, "each is a category of individual and group identity, but they are also social structures. They are not just about identity but are about group location in a system of power and inequality" (p.63). As such, an individual's race and gender have social significance because they inform the degree of power an individual is afforded in certain social interactions, and they can also potentially inform other people's initial impressions and assumptions about that individual. In this framework, I consider how teachers' race and gender influence the process of relationship-building. First I explore the role teachers' race and gender play in either facilitating or constraining initial interactions with Black male students, especially in terms of the preliminary assumptions the students make about the teacher. Second, I examine how teachers modify their relational practices when engaging with Black male students based on whether their race and gender match the race and gender of their students.

Life experience. In this framework, I focus on external dimensions of identity that inform the teachers' worldviews, including their schooling experiences, family background, and professional experiences. Hollins (1999) claims, "It is apparent that teachers' perspectives guide their professional practice in classrooms and that those

perspectives are derived from multiple sources including early socialization in the home, schooling experience, and professional preparation provided by college and university" (p. 183). In this framework, I particularly focus on how a teacher's sense of self-efficacy, cultural awareness, and ability to empathize with their Black male students has been influenced by their life experiences.

External dimensions of identity, such as educational background and professional experience, can prepare teachers for their instructional roles and help them develop a strong sense of self-efficacy in terms of their classroom practice. Duncan-Andrade (2007) argues that a teacher's content knowledge is one of the most important assets they have to offer their students. Teachers who have a strong sense of self-efficacy not only have the necessary content knowledge to facilitate student learning, but they have also have a belief in their ability to help students learn. Consequently, a teacher's sense of self-efficacy has a profound effect on a teacher's ability to form a working alliance with students since it partially determines the extent to which they can help students meet their academic goals.

Additionally, teachers' life experiences often influence their development of cultural awareness and empathy. Teachers' life experiences, including their schooling experiences, family backgrounds, and professional experiences, can inform the beliefs, biases, and assumptions they hold about Black male adolescents; these beliefs can then influence how the teachers interact with their Black male students and whether they take an empathetic stance toward Black male adolescents.

Institutional role. Gardenswartz & Rowe (2003) claim that organizational categories "make a difference in assumptions, expectations, and opportunities" (p. 53).

As such, both the institution a teacher works for as well as their role within that institution shape their relationships with students in terms of a) the common tasks they must undertake and the common goals they must work towards, and b) the opportunities the teachers has to meaningfully interact with students both within and outside the classroom. Their role determines the content matter they teach, the accountability measures in place for that content area, the amount of flexibility they have over the curriculum and the allocation of class time, and the extent to which students' presence in their classrooms is mandatory or voluntary. Each of these factors impacts the condition under which teachers engage in working alliances with their students. Additionally, the overarching ethos and values of the school can impact teachers' ability to form meaningful relationships with their Black male students since teachers are ultimately institutional agents (Allen, 2015; Bartolomé, 1994, Camangian, 2015; Margonis, 2004).

Conceptual framework summary.

The overall conceptual framework for this study provides a means for understanding the process by which teachers can successfully initiate and maintain productive relationships with Black male students and the multiple factors that influence this process. In this context, I define a productive student-teacher relationship as an effective working alliance in which the teacher and student share a common bond and work collaboratively on relevant tasks that lead to students successfully achieving their learning goals. For teachers to establish a working alliance that sufficiently meets the care-based needs of their Black male students, they must embed a praxis of politicized care in all components of the working alliance. The manner by which teachers authentically establish a working alliance with Black male adolescents that is undergirded

by a praxis of politicized care is influenced by the different dimensions of the teacher's personal identity, particularly their race, gender, institutional role and the perspective and skills they have gained through their life experience.

Literature Review

Relationships inform multiple aspects of our daily lives. In all manner of situations, we choose the people with whom we enter into relationships, but as teachers we are challenged to form relationships with each child who enters our room. This situation requires that teachers intentionally and strategically approach the process of relationship-building. In this literature review, I consider a broad range of conceptual and empirical literature on student-teacher relationships. I begin by providing a general overview of the relationship-building process between students and teachers and the benefits of student-teacher relationships for students in general. I next discuss the importance of student-teacher relationships for three demographic groups: adolescents, males, and Black and Latinx students. Then, resonant with critical race theory, which asserts that when working with marginalized populations, researchers must consider the intersecting identities of their participants (Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013), I review the literature on how the intersection of these three identities impact student-teacher relationships with Black male adolescents. I then specifically review the literature on teachers' relationships with Black male adolescents in racially and socioeconomically diverse school settings as well as within parochial schools. I conclude this review with the findings from previous research on how teachers can effectively engage Black male students in meaningful relationships and the role that a teacher's race and gender match may play in these interactions.

Building positive student-teacher relationships.

The teacher-student relationship can often be a prerequisite to learning and a vital element for students' educational success (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2009; Konjufu, 2018; Milner, 2015; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Rodriguez, 2014). Milner (2015) argues, "Relationship building is an instructional approach, not a tangential social interaction, which can have a lasting influence on student outcomes" (p.94). As part of their work, teachers must attend to their relationships with students, which are developed over time through repeated interactions both inside and outside the classroom (Classens et al., 2017, Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010). The perspectives that both the teachers and the students bring to these interactions and what occurs during the interactions impact the overall quality of the student-teacher relationship (Brinkworth, McIntyre, Juraschek, & Gehlbach, 2018; McHugh et al., 2013; Toste et al., 2015). Despite the dyadic nature of the relationship and the necessity that both the teacher and the student mutually engage in each interaction (McHugh et al., 2013), the teacher bears the responsibility for initiating and maintaining the relationship with the student (Milner, 2010; Reichert & Hawley, 2014).

In order to initiate authentic relationships with students, teachers must be willing to find the worth in each student (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010; Warren, 2013) and have the opportunity to observe students at their best in "arenas close to their heart" (Reichert & Hawley, 2014, p.62). Teachers who are deeply committed to building meaningful relationships with students often find it necessary to interact with students not only in the classroom but also in spaces and places beyond the classroom walls (Brooms, 2019; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010; Reichert & Hawley,

2014). Classens et al. (2017) claim, “students and teachers co-construct in-between spaces where informal interactions take place…it is in these spaces that the teacher and the student can renegotiate their relationship" (p.489). By engaging students in spaces outside the classroom, teachers can demonstrate that they recognize their students’ humanity and see them as multifaceted persons rather than as simple test scores. When students recognize that their teachers are genuinely interested in them and invested in their success, they place their trust in the teacher and are more willing to engage in a productive relationship (Brockenbrough, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Warren, 2013).

If teachers are to maintain a productive relationship with their students, they need to move beyond an interpersonal bond and ensure that they are addressing students’ academic needs and facilitating their mastery of the subject matter (Reichert & Hawley, 2014). As an expert facilitator of the students’ learning, a teacher should have mastery of their subject area and knowledge of their individual students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010; Murrell, 2001; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Thompson, Warren, Foy, & Dickerson, 2008). When teachers have mastery of their subject area, they are able to manipulate the curriculum to meet students’ needs, to respond to students’ interest and talents, and to engage in collaborative work with their students (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Raider-Roth, 2005).

While teachers’ subject mastery and academic support of students are essential components of maintaining a productive student-teacher relationship, they alone are not sufficient (Milner, 2015; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Thompson et al., 2008). Since many students need to be engaged in an interpersonal relationship with their teachers in order to

engage in the curriculum (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2002; Irvine, 2009; Konjufu, 2018; Nieto, 2010; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Rodriguez, 2014), teachers also must ensure that they maintain their awareness of the overall relationship and monitor and mend any interpersonal strains. Teachers can maintain the health of their relationships with students by a) using empathy to view their interactions with students from the students' perspectives (Allen, 2015; Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2014, Rodriguez, 2014; Warren 2013), b) admitting fault when warranted (Reichert & Hawley, 2014); and c) being willing to reconsider assumptions and approaches when needed (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Raider-Roth, 2005). Teachers need to approach students with unconditional regard (Phillippo, 2012), have frank conversation with students about conflicts that arise, and lean into the messy and difficult components of the relationships (Hunter & Stinson, 2019; Reichert & Hawley, 2014) in order to maintain the students' trust that the teacher wants what is best for them (Fergus et al., 2014; Lynn et al., 2010; Muller et al., 1999).

The effects of positive student-teacher relationships.

The ultimate purpose for building a positive student-teacher relationship is to support students' academic achievement and personal development

Socio-emotional benefits. Productive student-teacher relationships should promote positive psychological benefits for students. Students who have closer student-teacher relationships often have a greater sense of belonging, which leads to lower levels of anxiety, social withdrawal (Sabol & Pianta, 2012), and depressive symptoms (Davis, 2003; Fredriksen & Rhoades, 2004; Way, Reddy & Rhodes, 2007) as well as decreased behavioral referrals (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Decker et al., 2007). Not only do

positive student-teacher relationships reduce negative psychological and behavioral outcomes, but they also increase positive psychological outcomes (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014; Milner, 2015; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). As students' sense of competency increases, they also experience increases in self-esteem and self-confidence (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Way et al., 2007), develop more positive self-perceptions (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014; Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008), and report a greater sense of academic efficacy (Ruzek et al., 2016). Furthermore, adolescents who perceive teachers as having positive regard for their academic ability and as being available for help, show increased motivations to learn and better mental health over time (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). When positive student-teacher relationships allow students to feel connected, safe, and secure in the classroom, students tend to experience improved academic dispositions and outcomes (Wentzel, 1997).

Academic benefits. Positive student-teacher relationships can motivate students to adopt academic dispositions which can lead to academic achievement (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Noam & Fiore, 2004; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011). Student-teacher relationships can be a powerful lever impacting students' school attendance, which is often a pre-requisite for academic achievement (Anderson et al., 2004; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Klem & Connell, 2004). Additionally, positive student-teacher relationships can draw students into the learning process and motivate them to put forth effort in the classroom (Montalvo, Mansfield, & Miller, 2007; Roeser et al., 1996; Skinner et al., 2008; Wentzel, 1997), which may result in increased student participation and engagement (Anderson et al., 2004, Davis, 2003; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; McHugh

et al., 2013; Phillippo, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011; Wentzel, 1997). Additionally, students who feel secure in their relationships with their teachers are more likely to take intellectual risks (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011) and to exhibit help seeking behaviors (Montalvo et al., 2007), which both lead to improved academic achievement. Positive student-teacher relationships have also been found to impact student academic achievement in more tangible ways including improved GPA (Anderson et al., 2004; Davis, 2003; Murray & Malmgren, 2005; Phillippo, 2012), increased achievement test scores (Klem & Connell, 2004; Muller et al., 1999; Wentzel, 1997), and persistence to graduation (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Davis & Dupper, 2004; Montalvo et al., 2007; Phillippo, 2012).

Student-teacher relationships & Black male adolescents.

Although productive student-teacher relationships are important for all students, there are certain student populations for which these relationships are more critical including male students, older students, and minority students (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Murray & Malmgren, 2005; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). In this section I first describe the impact that productive student-teacher relationships have on three separate student populations—adolescents, males, and Black and Latinx students—and then discuss how these three components intersect in Black male adolescents' experiences of the student-teacher relationship.

Adolescents. Adolescence is a critical stage in human development; the behaviors and patterns that adolescents adopt during this time can have lifelong consequences. Therefore, adolescents need "a stable, supportive bond with a caring adult who can help them prepare for social roles that earn respect, route them to needed resources, and

encourage them to persist in education" (Carnegie Corporation, 1995). However, student-teacher relationships often deteriorate during the transition to middle school when the school structure "changes from small and nurturing to large and distant" (Kennedy, 2011, p.10). During this transition, many students encounter an increasingly impersonal environment (Davis, 2003; Decker et al., 2007; Goodenow, 1993; Kennedy, 2011; Noam & Fiore, 2004; Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Wentzel; 1997) where the primary emphasis is often on control rather than care, and there is a "preoccupation with content and compliance" (Toshalis, 2016, p.19). Thus, "schools become disconnected space for Youth of Color that focus on controlling their behaviors rather than developing community" (Watson, 2018, p.363).

During this transition, adolescents simultaneously experience "pronounced shifts in their cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development" (Brown, Kanny, & Johnson, 2014). As they grapple with their identity and place in the world, they may experience greater psychosocial instability, decreased adult supervision, and exhibit more risk taking behavior (Brown et al., 2014). They often spend more time with their peers as they distance themselves from their parents in an attempt to assert their independence (Brown et al., 2014; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Noam & Fiore, 2004).

Despite the pervasive decline in student-teacher relationship quality during middle and high school, teachers still offer a potentially crucial source of adult support during this time. Researchers suggest that student-teacher relationships continue to have a meaningful impact on students throughout high school (Croninger & Lee, 2011; Davis, 2003; Roorda et al., 2011) and may become even more important for adolescents who are

seeking an adult role model outside of their immediate families (Goodenow, 1993; Johnson; 2009; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Toshalis, 2016). Teachers can provide the necessary adult guidance for adolescents as they are "bridging the many worlds they inhabit institutionally and interpersonally" (Noam & Fiore, 2004, p.10) during their transition to adulthood (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004).

***Male students*.** Researchers find that males of all ages tend to have more negative relationships with teachers than females (Decker et al., 2007; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Raider-Roth, Albert, Bircann-Barkey, Gidseg, & Murray, 2008; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011). Reichert and Hawley (2014) found that teachers had a "tendency to psychologize or pathologize boys with whom they were unable to relate, some teachers also attributed boys' unreachability to larger social forces: prevailing gender attitudes or social class" (p.148). Kindlon and Thompson (2000) suggest that due to stereotypical notions of traditional masculinity in which males are characterized as being aggressive, uncaring, and stoic, teachers and other adults often believe that males do not value relationships. Yet despite teachers' frequent inability to connect with their male students and teachers' beliefs that male students devalue interpersonal relationships, "boys throughout their lives, but especially during adolescence, need close, supportive, relationships" (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, p.7). Many researchers have identified male students as relational learners, "who view the learning process as inherently embedded in relationship" (Raider-Roth et al., 2008) and who "often experience their teachers before they experience the lessons they teach" (Reichert & Hawley, 2014, p. 11). Nelson (2016) found that even when they did not outwardly express it, male students appreciated when teachers conveyed a sense of care

for them. Therefore it is imperative that teachers make an effort to connect with their male students to support both their emotional and academic development.

Black & Latinx students. Students' relationships with teachers are not only influenced by their age and gender, but also by their race. Critical race theorists posit that racism is embedded in all facets of society (Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013) and that "people's experiences are mediated, constructed, and informed by their race" (Milner, 2015, p.236). Therefore, how students experience schools and their teachers is inevitably impacted by their race. Bartolomè (1994) claims,

> U.S. school systems create a power imbalance and a deficit orientation towards students from different cultural backgrounds and as a result they produce rigid and mechanistic teacher-student relations that create classroom conditions in which there is very little opportunity for teachers and students to interact in meaningful ways, establish positive and trusting working relationships, and share knowledge (p.179).

Due to this power imbalance and teachers deficit laden perspectives, many Black and Latinx students view schools as oppressive institutions and believe their teachers often prioritize the demands and structures of the institution over the needs and well-being of the students (Camangian, 2015; Davis, 2009). The inability of many teachers to recognize the myriad ways that their roles replicate systems of oppression can create a divide between teachers and students that may impact the students' overall experience and achievement within the classroom (Rojas & Liou, 2017; Toshalis, 2012). Margonis (2004) argues,

> If a teacher, who is pitted against students by the institutional relationships of the larger society, seeks to cope in the classroom by putting on an iron mask and does not attend to the distinctive student interests, the students – in response – do not engage with the material or the teacher (p.51).

As a result of teachers' often impersonal and at times hostile treatment of students, Black and Latinx students may feel alienated, be less motivated to participate in the class, and may disengage from the class or school all together (Canton, 2012; Davis & Dupper, 2004; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Rojas & Liou, 2017).

Even though student-teacher relationships can be particularly problematic for Black and Brown students (Brockenbrough, 2014; Davis, 2009; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Lynn et al., 2010; Love, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Wilson, 2016), researchers have found that when teachers initiate and maintain positive relationships with students of color, these positive relationships may benefit Black and Brown students as much or more than their White peers (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Irvine, 2009; Phillippo, 2012; Roorda et al., 2011; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Moore and Smith (2019) assert, "Most ethnically diverse students perform better academically in encouraging, caring, and warm classrooms" (p.41). Therefore, teachers must attend to their own biases and approach students from a place of mutual respect in order to promote productive relationships with students who have been traditionally marginalized in school settings.

Black male adolescents. While student-teacher relationships are important for adolescents, males, and Black and Latinx students separately, they are crucial for many Black male adolescents who experience the overlapping impact of each of these social identities (Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Little, 2018; Milner, 2015; Washington, 2018).

Howard (2014) argues that "the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and other identity markers is fundamentally critical in research with young Black males…each marker in its own way profoundly influences identity construction, self-concept, interaction with the world, and meaning-making" (p.41). As adolescents, Black male students are often rendered powerless in schools given their subordinate role as students who are constantly under adult surveillance (Little, 2018). Throughout their lives, "Black males find themselves in perpetual negotiation as they seek to reconcile their own individual lived experiences with prescribed societal expectations and limitations" (Howard & Reynolds, 2013, p.238). For many Black male adolescents, this process of negotiation becomes a more salient part of their daily lives during adolescence when they begin to develop a more mature racial identity and come to see the societal impediments and stereotypical associations that are a part of being young, Black, and male in the U.S. (Brooms, 2017; Cross et al., 1999; Fergus et al., 2014; Noguera, 2008; Roderick, 2003). As such Davis (2009) finds, "African American males do not by and large feel a sense of ownership and/or belonging to schools and their purpose" (p.409).

Additionally as Black male adolescents transition from middle school to high school, they experience greater academic difficulty, and more than any other student group, experience significant declines in both support and teacher relationship quality (Roderick, 2003). In large high schools, students become more anonymous; this anonymity is particularly detrimental for Black male students because teachers rely more heavily on stereotypes rather than knowledge of individual students to form their opinions about and inform their interactions with Black male students (Brockenbrough, 2014; Love, 2013; Lynn et al., 2010; Milner, 2015; Roderick, 2003). In many U.S.

schools the failure of Black male youth is accepted as the norm leading many teachers to lower standards and abdicate responsibility for educating the Black male students in their classrooms because they believe these students' futures have already been predetermined (Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008). As a result, many Black male students "are placed in schools where their needs for nurturing, support, and loving discipline are not met. Instead they are labeled, shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle of failure" (Noguera, 2008, p. xxi).

When teachers treat their Black male students with hostility or benignly neglect them, their actions can have a significant impact on Black male adolescents, who often desire a more meaningful relationship with their teachers (Konjufu, 2018; Nelson, 2016). Konjufu (2018) writes "for Black boys, relationships are more significant than content or pedagogy. Too many teachers believe they teach subjects, not Black boys" (Konjufu, 2018, p.95). Lynn et al. (2010) found that Black males adolescents' motivation and academic performance suffered when they had repeated negative encounters with teachers, when teachers did not believe in their ability to succeed, or when they did not feel as if teachers cared about them. Overall, they found that teachers' lowered expectations resulted in poor outcomes for Black male youth and created barriers to their success both in the classroom and beyond high school.

Black male adolescents in diverse school contexts. The majority of research on Black male students' relationships with their teachers has been conducted in urban schools where the student population is primarily comprised of students of color. However, Black male adolescents who attend more racially and socio-economically diverse schools also tend to experience similar negative relationships with their teachers

(Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Gordon (2012) finds that the "normalized conception of African American males as academically and socially problematic has become common place" (p.3). Thus, teachers hold stereotypical notions of Black male students regardless of their socio-economic standing or the type of school they attend. These stereotypes surface when teachers attribute certain characteristics such as laziness, criminality, and lack of work ethic to their Black male students, which can often lead teachers to then hold lower expectation for Black male adolescents than they do their White peers (Allen, 2010; Diamond, 2006).

Similar to Black male students in urban schools, Black male students in more racially integrated schools frequently encounter discrimination at school. Gosa & Alexander (2007) argue that "in the black community, the common experience of discrimination tends to override distinctions of social class and other individual characteristics" (p.306). Black male students, regardless of the type of school they attend, encounter discrimination in school in three primary ways: "a) structurally by having limited access to valued resources outside of school, b) institutionally by being positioned systematically in the least advantaged location for learning inside schools, c) ideologically by having their intellectual capacity questioned and their cultural styles devalued both within school and in the broader social discourse" (Diamond, 2006, p.496). Thus, even when students attend more racially and socio-economically diverse schools, they still encounter discriminatory practices such as tracking or micro-aggressions from staff and other students (Allen, 2010). These constant oppressive encounters can impact their ability and desire to build meaningful relationships with teachers.

At times, Black males students in more racially diverse schools may in fact have to navigate more blatant representations of discrimination as they can often feel either othered or overlooked during their interactions with White peers, teachers, and school officials. For instance, Kuriloff, Soto & Garver (2012) found that Black students in racially diverse schools "were more likely than White, Hispanic, or Asian students to report that their teacher did not listen to them" (p. 101). Additionally, Black male students in racially diverse schools must often deal with pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture while also receiving constant implicit and explicit messages that "they are not fully a part of the dominant white culture in which they live" (Gordon, 2012, p.19). Thus, regardless of their school's racial and socio-economic demographics, Black male adolescents often encounter challenges when attempting to enter into meaningful relationships with their teachers.

Black male adolescents in parochial schools. During the 1990s, several studies were conducted that examined the benefits of Catholic schools for students of color, particularly African American youth. According to York (1997) Catholic schools were found to be "more effective than public schools particularly more effective for the education of African American students" (p.21). Irvine's (1997) research supports this finding, and she suggests that this phenomenon could perhaps be attributed to "an interesting parallel between the teaching styles of African American teachers in segregated schools pre-Brown and Catholic school teachers" (p. 172). Several researchers attributed parochial schools' effectiveness with Black students to their focus on the student-teacher relationship particularly their emphasis on high expectation for all students, the education of the whole child, and teachers' expanded roles beyond the

classroom (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1997; Irvine, 1997). However, like within public schools, the majority of research on Black students in Catholic schools concentrates on urban Catholic schools, which are often predominately populated by students of color. Enrollment in all Catholic schools has declined over the past two decades forcing many of these schools especially those in urban centers to close (McDonald & Schultz, 2019), and at present only 3.6% of U.S. students attend Catholic schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) and only 7% of those students are Black (Morris, 2014).

The impact of Catholic schools on Black students' development is further complicated by the findings from studies that look at the experience of Black students in predominately White Catholic schools, which suggest that unpacking Black students' experiences in Catholic schools is complicated. While many Black students continue to experience individual academic success in Catholic schools, they also experience negative interactions that can at times affect their sense of self (Simmons, 2012).

Effective teachers of Black male adolescents.

Since positive student-teacher relationships can be critical for Black male students' school success, it is essential that educators understand how teachers can forge meaningful relationships with their Black male students. Educators must take into consideration how the formation of relationships with Black male adolescents may differ from other student populations. In the past several decades many scholars, particularly scholars of color, have designed studies on effective teaching in which they foreground the perspectives and experiences of Black male adolescents (Brockenbrough, 2014; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2014; Warren, 2013; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). These scholars highlight three potential practices teachers can

adopt to more effectively build relationships with Black male students: 1) approach their Black male students from a stance of empathetic regard, 2) enact a praxis of politicized care for their students, and 3) adopt pedagogical approaches that acknowledge Black male adolescents' social, cultural, and political realities.

Researchers have found that effective teachers of Black male students take an empathetic stance toward their students attempting to see things from their perspectives and understand their points of view. Warren (2013) asserts, "Empathy improves the likelihood that teachers may build trusting relationship with students and families, establish positive classroom climates, take risks, be flexible, and take proactive steps to ensure each classroom interaction produces favorable student outcomes" (p.194). For teachers to take am empathetic stance toward their students, they must "have a willingness to see the world through their [students'] eyes, the way it is rather than the way we think it is or want it to be" (Duncan, 2002, p. 141), and they must also take the time to know their students as people, "who they are, their powers and limitations, their needs and what is conducive to their growth" (Webb & Blond, 1995, p.611). To build strong relationships with students, teachers need to recognize that they might not always see the whole picture and must express a genuine desire to understand their students' life experiences (Watson, 2018). In multiple studies that forefront Black male adolescents' voices, students have expressed a desire for teachers who are willing to let them explain rather than jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about the motives behind their behaviors (Harper et al., 2014; Howard, 2014; Nelson, 2016; Rodriguez, 2008). When teachers listen to their students and approach them from a place of empathy, they are

more likely to be successful in building productive working alliances with Black male youth.

Effective teachers of Black male students not only have an empathetic regard for their students but they must also enact a praxis of politicized care for their Black male students. Teachers can enact a praxis of politicized care through a combination of academic press, instrumental support, and acknowledgement of the historical, economical, and sociopolitical realities students face in their daily lives (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Fergus et al., 2014; Roberts, 2010; Thompson, 1998; Watson et al., 2016, Watson, 2018). To care for a student, a teacher must hold them to high expectation but also ensure that they have the needed support to meet those expectations. Gay (2000) notes that care for students of color must be maintained in "both a concern for the person and the performance" (p.47). She argues, "A most effective way to be uncaring and unconcerned is to tolerate and/or facilitate academic apathy, disengagement, and failure" (p. 48).

A praxis of politicized care requires that educators not only attend to the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of Black male youth, but also that they address systemic issues of oppression (Roberts, 2010; Watson et al., 2016, Watson, 2018). Watson et al. (2016) argue, "education must be a humanizing process in which young people gain a heightened awareness of their capacities and a will to enhance their lives and the lives of those around them" (p. 981). If teachers are to have meaningful relationships with Black male students, they must have "some understanding of the systemic, political, economic, and social structures that disproportionately appropriate opportunity according to race" (Parsons, 2005, p.26), must help their students to navigate with dignity an oppressive

world, and must fight alongside their Black male students to dismantle ongoing structural inequalities (McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Roberts, 2010). Watson (2018) argues, "Showing care becomes a political act when those efforts are made with an awareness of societal barriers while challenging liberal and meritocratic definitions of growth and success" (p.376). McKinney de Royston et al. (2017) similarly argue teachers, who express empathetic regard and politicized care for their students, "construct humanizing spaces where African American youths' identities, experiences, and practices are valued as integral resources to their personal development, their academic success, and to the advancement of the race" (p.9).

Warm demander pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy are two relational approaches to instruction where teachers can enact a praxis of politicized care and humanizing pedagogies. Warm demander pedagogy combines academic press with untiring support from teachers who push students towards success and do not tolerate failure as an option (Ware, 2006). Warm demanders may often communicate their care for students through tough love, however; despite their sometimes strict approach to students and frequent constructive feedback, the teachers' actions are taken out of concern for the students' future success. Warm demanders demonstrate care for their Black male students through an emphasis on learning at all costs because they want their students to be able to leverage "education for political and economic success" (Ware, 2006, p. 429).

Culturally relevant pedagogy expands on the concept of warm demander pedagogy to look not only at the pedagogical approach of the educator but also at the curriculum. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a "pedagogy of opposition" in which students

come to see that they can achieve academic success without assimilation into the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers, who embrace culturally relevant pedagogy, emphasize students' academic success, the development and maintenance of their cultural competence, and the formation of students' sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Furthermore they "use student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p.17). Teachers who enact culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrate a praxis of politicized care by responding to the needs of the whole child and creating a community of learners in which each student feels respected and all students are committed to "collective not just individual empowerment" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Both warm demander pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy rely on strong student-teacher relationships in which teachers' care for students translates into working alliances that promote students' personal and academic success.

Impact of teachers' race & gender on relationship with Black male adolescents.

Some scholars have found that when there is a lack of cultural congruence between teachers and students, Black students can experience adverse effects. Roberts and Irvine (2009) claim, "The lack of cultural sync becomes evident in instructional situations when teachers misinterpret, denigrate, and dismiss African American students' language, non-verbal cues, physical movements, learning styles, cognitive approaches, and worldviews" (p. 142). Conversely, Black students' exposure to same race teachers can have positive outcomes leading to lower levels of negative discipline especially in regards to discretionary referrals (Davis, 2009, Dee, 2004; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Irvine,

2009; Lindsay & Harte, 2017; Redding, 2019), more favorable teacher perceptions of students (Dee, 2004; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016; Lynn et al., 2010; Oates, 2003), and gains in student achievement (Dee, 2004; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Oates, 2003). Researchers have also found that these effects are magnified for students when there is both a race and gender match with the teacher (Dee, 2007; Lynn et al., 2010).

These benefits have been explained by a variety of theories, but the two most salient theories revolve around role model effects and stereotype threat (Dee, 2004; Dee, 2007; Oates, 2003). Role model effects suggest that "pupils may trust and respect someone with whom they share a salient characteristic, making learning come more easily" (Dee, 2004, p. 53). It is not only the fact that a teacher may look like them but that for Black students, "Both historically and presently these [Black] teachers experience and understand the world in ways similar to their students" (Milner, 2009, p.129). The role model effect also encompasses the Black feminist tradition of othermothering in which Black teachers take on a role as extended family who care for their students as they would their own children. They take responsibility for their students' socio-emotional and socio-political development (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Ware, 2006). As such they demonstrate care for students by seeking to "alert young people to the various threats to their survival and flourishing, so as to help them learn to respond to racism and sexism productively and without loss of integrity" (Thompson, 2004, p.31).

In contrast, stereotype threat suggests that students may underperform when they perceive that teachers attribute certain negative stereotypes to them based on their race or gender (Dee, 2004). Gershenson et al. (2016) found that "non-black teachers have

significantly lower expectations for black students than do black teachers" (p.211), and students were often highly aware of their teachers' lowered expectations. Dance (2012) found "stigmatization was like 'baggage' that teachers and other representatives of the mainstream constantly offered to young Black (and Latino) boys" (p.142). This baggage weighed heavily on students' psyches and could at time make it difficult to learn.

While research suggests that student and teacher gender and race match have an impact on the school experiences and academic achievement of Black male adolescents, these characteristics alone do not guarantee a solid student-teacher relationship or student achievement. Bristol (2015) argues that "it is short sighted to presume that the learning of boys and Black boys in particular can be improved simply by increasing the number of Black male teachers" (p.57). Researchers suggest that more than the race or gender of the teacher, what most impacts the students' success is the teachers' beliefs about Black male students. Duncan-Andrade (2007) argues that "effective teachers come from various backgrounds (racial, social, economic)," but "they are bound by common principles" (p.624), including a commitment to students, a belief in the capacity and potential of students , and a dedication to the teacher's own continual learning and development. Likewise Brockenbrough (2014) argues that while White women cannot act as "other mothers" since they do not possess the same "ways of being and knowing" that Black women possess, they can still play important roles as further mothers who are "devoted to offering care, support, and unapologetic love to black children" (p.256). Unlike Black female teachers who have themselves had to endure the indignities of racism and oppression, White female teachers cannot have a full understanding of the impact that racism and oppression have on their Black male students; however, they can still develop

strong caring relationships with their Black male students by acknowledging their experiences and expressing sincere empathy for their student. Similarly Toldson (2013) argues that teachers need the ability "to not only 'teach' a student but to 'reach' a student (p.21), and that "any teacher regardless of race and gender can teach black students" (p.20) if they are willing to reach them. Thus, teachers regardless of their background must recognize that they teach people not just content. Teachers who view all students from an asset-based perspective and are willingly to listen and learn from and about their students can build productive relationships with Black male students – but they must possess the desire to do so.

Gap in the literature.

These bodies of literature reveal that before some Black adolescent males can engage in meaningful learning, they must first enter into productive relationships with their teachers. Black male students are more willing to enter into relationships with teachers when the teacher demonstrates empathetic regard, a praxis of politicized care, and culturally relevant pedagogical practices. While scholars have acknowledged that these approaches help teachers to build relationships with their Black male students, less is known about how a) these practices get implemented within racially and socio-economically diverse high schools and b) how the enactment of these practices varies based on the multiple dimensions of a teacher's personal identity. In this study, I examine these aspects of relationship-building and explore how teachers of different races and genders implement a praxis of politicized care that leads to the formation of a productive student-teacher relationship with their Black male students. I elicit both student and teacher perspectives to uncover the relational practices teachers use to initiate and

maintain productive student teacher relationships with Black male students, paying particular attention to the ways the dimensions of teachers' personal identities, especially their race and gender, influence their approach to relationships with Black male adolescents.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

In this study, I use a qualitative research design to better understand the teachers' and Black male students' perspectives on their relationships, and to answer the following research questions:

1) How do teachers at a racially and socio-economically diverse high school initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students?

2) How does a teacher's identity – particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role – influence the ways they initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students?

Rationale for Qualitative Collective Case Study

Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) where the researcher can "see the world in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these" (Maxwell, 2013, p.30). By employing a qualitative collective case study design, I forefront the stories and perspectives of my participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) to better understand the focal teachers' relational practices as interpreted by the teachers and their Black male students.

Since the primary purpose of this study was to gain insight into how teachers initiate and maintain productive relationship with Black male students, I employed a collective case study design based on three instrumental case studies. This design allowed me to collect in-depth data on each individual case and to perform a cross-case analysis to explore "different perspective on the issue" (Creswell & Poth, 2018 p. 74). This approach made it possible to investigate the relational practices of each individual teacher (the instrumental case), and to perform a cross case analysis where I identified the

practices the teachers shared in common as well as the unique practices that were attributed to individual teachers.

Context

This study took place at an all-boys parochial school in the suburb of a Mid-Atlantic city, which I refer to in this study as Corby High School[1]. The school itself has a much higher level of racial diversity than many of the public schools in the region, and the school has seen an increase in the racial diversity of its student body over the last decade. During the 2018-2019 school year, the Corby High School's student population was approximately 50% Black, 40% White, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 3% multiracial. Additionally the school served a 48% non-Catholic population and enrolled students from a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds. The demographics of the school align with the school's mission to serve students of varied intellectual, religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds, and consequently the school's student body is representative of a more socio-economically and racially diverse population of students than found in many local charter or public schools.

Corby High School provided an appropriate site to study the phenomena of interest given the demographics of the student body and Corby's professed commitment to developing community as one the school's priorities; a focus that aligns with the relational ethos and whole child approach to education often associated with Catholic schools (Bryk et al., 1997; Irvine, 1997; York, 1997). These values are reflected in Corby's mission which states that they strive to develop students who are not only academically well rounded but also have a dedication to moral principles and a

[1] Throughout the study, I use pseudonyms for both the school and all participants.

commitment to serving others. Additionally, situating the study within an all-boys school made it possible for me to more closely examine how teachers were specifically relating to the males in their classrooms. Finally, Corby High School provided a site where my research would have practical utility for the staff and students at the local site. The philosophy of the school focuses on the importance of teachers' continual development and improvement through self-study. The principal of Corby invests heavily in his teachers' professional growth offering opportunities for teachers to both run professional development activities for their peers and to attend outside professional development. Given the shifts in the racial demographics of the student body over the last several years, the principal welcomed the study as he felt the findings could be useful as he considers how to support his staff in forming productive positive relationships with all of their students.

Case Selection

As the goal of qualitative research is to be "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 1998, p.6), case studies tend to include small samples that allow the researcher to spend more time gaining in-depth knowledge of the context and participants (Merriam, 1998; Maxwell, 2013). In this study, I focus on the cases of three teachers at Corby High School: Mr. Fitzgerald, Mr. Nelson, and Mrs. Compass.

I used purposeful sampling to select my participants. Purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p.61). Since the ultimate purpose of this research is to offer suggestions on how teacher education programs and school administrators can support teachers in

forming productive relationships with Black male students, I believed this process could best be understood by uncovering the practices and perspectives of teachers who have been student-identified as being successful in this area.

Each spring, Corby High School administers a senior exit survey, which asks students to reflect on their experience during their time enrolled at the school; one of the survey questions asks students to identify teachers or staff who they admire or who have made a lasting impact on them and to briefly explain their response. The school provided me with the survey responses to this question for the last five years (2014-2018) with the data disaggregated by the students' race. I used the results of these surveys to select the focal teachers for the study since they provided me with a pre-existing authentic source from which to identify teachers who had strong student-teacher relationships with Black male students.

In my original analysis of the survey data, I looked for teachers who each year were mentioned by an average of at least twenty students and for whom at least a third of those mentions came from Black male students. Then, guided by the literature on the practices of effective teachers of Black male adolescents, I looked for instances within the survey explanations where students mentioned teacher care, support, and high expectations. Through this process, I identified twelve teachers who met the criteria; ten of whom were still teaching at Corby High School during the 2018-2019 school year. One teacher was eliminated from this pool based on the recommendations of the administrators who indicated he had a lot on his plate for the upcoming year and may not have the time; I chose to eliminate another teacher because he only taught religion, and I

wanted to look at teachers who were working in subjects that might have potential counterparts in public schools.

From the eight remaining teachers, I sampled for maximum variation based on the teachers' race and gender (Maxwell, 2013). Since only two female teachers were identified, one White and one Black, I invited both to participate in the study. From the remaining list of six male teachers (two Black, four White), I randomly selected one Black male teacher and one White male teacher and invited them to participate in the study. All four teachers I initially invited agreed to participate in the study. Thus, my original sample consisted of one White female teacher, one Black female teacher, one Black male teacher, and one White male teacher. However, given issues with scheduling and consenting focal students for the Black female teacher, I was unable to collect a full data set for her and therefore did not include her as part of my data analysis. As a result my instrumental cases were Mrs. Compass, a White female co-director of academic support; Mr. Fitzgerald, a White male English teacher, and Mr. Nelson a Black male art teacher. All three focal teachers had multiple years of experience and had spent their entire teaching careers at Corby High School. I provide a brief overview of each teacher in Table 1.

Table 1
Teacher Participant Characteristics

Teacher	Role	Race	Gender	Years Teaching at Corby High School
Mrs. Compass	Co-director of Academic Support	White	Female	10
Mr. Fitzgerald	English Teacher	White	Male	13
Mr. Nelson	Art Teacher	Black	Male	27

Student Participants

In addition to the focal teachers, eight Black male students participated in the study, 2-3 focal students per teacher. To identify these focal students, each focal teacher provided me with names of Black male students who they were currently teaching or working with on a consistent basis and with whom they felt they had a positive working relationship. In instances where the focal teachers provided more than 2-3 suggested students, I chose the 2-3 focal students at random. Once the potential student participants had been identified, the school counselor arranged for me to meet with them to explain the purpose of the study and to ask for their assent to participate. For the students who were under 18 years old, after they assented, I also obtained parental consent. All but one of the originally identified students agreed to participate in the study. I interviewed two focal students for Mr. Fitzgerald: Roger and Calvin; three focal students for Mr. Nelson: Brandon, Germaine, and James, and three focal students for Mrs. Compass: Anthony, Darius, and Malcolm. Although the interview questions for each focal student primarily focused on the focal teacher by whom they had originally been recommended, I found that many students would reference another one of the focal teachers in the study without knowing that they were also a part of the research project. I took these opportunities to get those students' perspectives on the additional focal teacher – thus there are instance where students spoke to their relationships with more than one of the focal teachers.

At the time of the study, all student participants were either sophomores or seniors at Corby High School, and all had attended the school since their freshman years. Prior to attending Corby, some students had attended public school, some private school, some Christian schools, some parochial school, and some had attended a combination of

multiple school types during their elementary and middle school years. The schools they attended before Corby had varying racial compositions: many of the students attended schools that were majority or all students of color, some attended more racially diverse institutions, and one had been the only student of color in his middle school class. Most of the students noted that Corby was significantly more diverse than their previous schools. They also came to Corby from multiple different areas in the metropolitan area in which Corby is located: some lived in the nearby major city, some in the county in which the school was located, and some in a nearby county.

I did not ask students directly about their socio-economic status but based on anecdotal information they provided or direct references they made, it was apparent that they came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. I also did not ask for their GPAs, but some did provide them, and from their own admissions and their teachers' descriptions, they ranged from honor roll students to consistent B/C students, from students in honors and AP classes to those in regular or remedial courses. They were all actively engaged in the extracurricular life of the school. Most were involved in some sort of athletic activity at Corby, and the sports they participated in ranged from football to soccer to lacrosse to rugby to track to crew. At least three seniors had received athletic scholarships for college. In addition to sports, the focal students participated and held leadership roles in the band, the art club, the ecology club, Black Students United (BSU), the school newspaper, and the mock trial team. A brief overview of each student is provided in Table 2.

While the primary focus of this research is on teachers and how they initiate and maintain productive student teacher relationship with their Black male students, I have

chosen to provide this background information on the focal students because I want to emphasize that there is no one definition of what it means to be a Black male adolescent. I attempted to speak with focal students who represented a multitude of Black male identities, but at the same time I caution that their feelings about and experiences at Corby High School and their relationships with the focal teachers are not fully representative of all Black male students' experiences at Corby High School.

Table 2
Student Participants

Student	Focal Teacher	Other Teachers Discussed	Grade during 2018-2019 School Year	Prior School Experience	School Involvement
Malcolm	Mrs. Compass		Senior	City public school* & City charter school*	Football
Darius	Mrs. Compass	Mr. Nelson	Senior	County public school*	Track BSU
Anthony	Mrs. Compass		Student	County public school* & County Christian school *	Football Track
Calvin	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Nelson	Sophomore	City charter school* & City charter school**	Mock Trial Newspaper Crew BSU
Roger	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Nelson	Sophomore	Nearby county public school**	Pep Band BSU
Germaine	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Fitzgerald	Senior	City public school**, City charter school ** & City private school ***	Lacrosse Ecology Club BSU
James	Mr. Nelson		Senior	County Christian school*	BSU Art Club Rugby
Brandon	Mr. Nelson		Senior	Nearby county Catholic school **	Band Soccer

* School's students were primarily of students of color.

** School's students were racially diverse

*** School's students were primarily White students

Data Collection

To increase the rigor of the study, I collected data from a variety of sources including teacher and student interviews, observations, and artifacts in order to triangulate my findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018, Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research "the use of triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.7). I was able to corroborate my findings across different sources and methods of data collection to strengthen the overall validity of my claims (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this section, I provide an overview of the data sources in Table 3. I then describe in more detail each data collection method and provide an explanation for why each method appropriately addressed the research questions.

Table 3
Data Sources

Teacher	Interviews	Student Interviews	Observations	Artifacts
Mrs. Compass	○ Interview #1 (10/9/2018) ○ Interview #2 (12/10/2018) ○ Interview #3 (3/15/2019)	○ Darius Interview #1 (1/24/2019) ○ Anthony Interview #1 (2/15/2019) ○ Malcolm Interview #1 (2/15/2019) ○ Darius Interview #2 (4/9/2019) ○ Anthony Interview #2 (4/10/2019) ○ Malcolm Interview #2 (4/16/2019)	○ Observation #1 (12/14/2018) ○ Observation #2 (1/31/2019) ○ Observation #2 (4/16/2019)	○ Darius's Essay ○ School Video on Brotherhood
Mr. Fitzgerald	○ Interview #1 (10/4/2018) ○ Interview #2 (12/6/2018) ○ Interview #3 ○ (3/15/2019)	○ Calvin Interview #1 (1/24/2019) ○ Roger Interview #1 (2/15/2019) ○ Roger Interview #2 (4/10/2019) ○ Calvin Interview #2 (4/30/2019)	○ Observation #1 (12/18/2018) ○ Observation #2 (3/15/2019) ○ Observation #3 (4/30/2019)	○ Roger's Personal Narrative ○ Teacher of the Year Write up
Mr. Nelson	○ Interview #1 (9/29/2018) ○ Interview #2 (12/13/2018) ○ Interview #3 (3/15/2019)	○ Brandon Interview #1 (1/24/2019) ○ Germaine Interview #1 (2/13/2019) ○ James Interview #1 (3/8/2019) ○ Germaine Interview #2 (4/9/2019) ○ Brandon Interview #2 (4/16/2019) ○ James Interview #2 (4/24/2019)	○ Observation #1 (12/13/2018) ○ Observation #2 (1/31/2019) ○ Observation #3 (2/15/2019)	○ Write up in School Newsletter ○ Personal Writings

Interviews.

A primary purpose of qualitative research is to understand the way people make meaning of their experiences by providing them an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words (Chase, 2008). Interviews help the researcher to "encompass the how of people's lives as well as the traditional what" (Fontana & Frey, 2011, p.119). Since the purpose of this study was to understand how teachers initiate and maintain productive relationship with Black male students, interviews were an appropriate method to capture insights into the teachers' practice to uncover what they did, why they did it, and how it impacted students. Given that most relational practices are effective because they are consistently instituted over time, I was not always directly able to witness vital moments in the relationship. Therefore interviews provided an opportunity to capture the internal world of the participants "when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam, 1998, p.72). Interviews allowed me to access in depth information on teachers' beliefs, skills, and understanding about their relational practices and to uncover the meaning both the teachers and students bestowed on these practices. By interviewing multiple sources about each focal teacher including the teachers themselves, I was able to develop a more in-depth description of the case and the phenomenon under study.

I employed a semi-structured interview format in which I prepared a set of guiding questions, but then also asked impromptu or follow up questions to each participant, so I could "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). While my initial interviews followed a more prescribed plan with a list of questions directed at each

participant, subsequent interviews were often based on what I had observed in the field or information provided during earlier interviews for which I wanted greater detail or clarification.

I interviewed both the focal teachers and the focal students multiple times over the course of the 2018-2019 school year. Each interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Teacher interviews. For each teacher, the initial semi-structured interview occurred at the beginning of the 2018 fall semester and lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes. During this initial interview, I gathered information about the teacher's life history, philosophy of teaching, prior relationships with Black male students, and views and beliefs about Black male adolescents (see interview protocol Appendix B).

I conducted two subsequent interviews with each teacher: one in December 2018 and one in March 2019. Each of these interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. The December interviews focused specifically on each teacher's perception of and relationships with the focal students. During these interviews, I asked teachers to note important moments in the development of the relationship, their current feelings about the student and the status of the relationship, areas of challenge and success in the relationship, and examples of specific interactions they have had with the student both inside and outside the classroom. The primary purpose of these interviews was to have teachers provide specific examples of how the relational strategies they identified in the first interview played out in real time with their actual students.

In March, I conducted a third round of interviews with the focal teachers. At this point I had had an opportunity to observe each of the teachers' classes. Stake (2010)

claims, “We can sometimes push respondents to sharper concentration by asking them to examine and respond to a specific statement, a story, an artifact, a quotation, or some such” (p.97). Accordingly, during these interviews I asked teachers to reflect and comment on particular interactions I noticed during my classroom observations or on information that arose from relevant artifacts I had collected or information that had been shared by students during their interviews. In addition I sought to clarify any remaining questions from earlier interviews and to get an update on any meaningful interactions they had had with the student since our last interview.

In addition to the three formal interviews I conducted with each teacher, I had multiple opportunities to informally interact with each teacher and discuss their practice. Often after an observation, we would informally debrief about what I had noticed or had questions about regarding the class even though no formal interview was scheduled. Between student interviews, teacher interviews, and observations I was at the school two to five days each month over the course of seven months, and I would frequently stop in to say a quick hello to my focal teachers even if I was not there for a scheduled visit with that particular participant. During these informal visits the teachers and I would engage in casual conversations about their practice, something that had happened in class that week, or they would share anecdotes about students that they felt were pertinent to my research. Although these more informal interactions were not audio-recorded, I journaled after the exchanges to capture any significant information relayed during these conversations.

Student interviews. I interviewed each of the eight focal students twice throughout the course of the second semester. These interviews lasted between fifteen and thirty-five minutes and were held on school grounds at a time that was mutually

convenient for the student, the school, and me. The initial interviews occurred primarily in January and February of 2019. In the initial student interview, I obtained background information on the student (grade, school history, family background), history of their prior relationships and interactions with teachers in general, their overall beliefs about what makes a teacher effective, their initial impressions of the focal teachers, and their insight into the focal teacher's relational practices (see interview protocol in Appendix C).

The second round of student interviews occurred throughout April 2019. I primarily used the second round of interviews as an opportunity to member check with the students and ask clarifying questions based on their responses during the first interview. Based on my initial interviews with the students, I created a short profile on each teacher that synthesized the information shared by all of the focal students I had initially interviewed about that teacher (see profiles in Appendix D). During the follow up interview, I gave each student an opportunity to read the profile and asked them to add in any missing information or to correct any information that had been misinterpreted. Additionally, I asked them to provide any additional anecdotes or insights on their relationships with the focal teacher since our last interview and also asked targeted and specific questions to get each student to expand on or clarify answers from their initial interview. Finally, I asked each student to offer their opinion on how if at all they saw their race and gender playing into their relationships with teachers and their overall educational experience.

Observations.

In addition to collecting interview data, I conducted formal observations of each teacher for at least three class sessions over the 2018-2019 school year. During these observations, I took running field notes that captured an overall impression of the teacher's pedagogy and the specific interactions between the teacher and their students, paying specific attention to how they interacted with the Black male students in the room. Additionally, during each initial observation I tried to create a full description of the physical environment in the room – particularly paying attention to how the room was configured and what was displayed on the walls. These classroom observations helped me to both verify information from previous teacher and student interviews and to generate questions for subsequent interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Since "observations can yield detailed information that may not be divulged during conversations" (Creswell, 2016, p. 117), classroom observations helped me create a fuller picture of the student-teacher relationship beyond the accounts and perspectives of the focal students and the teacher and allowed me to witness how the teachers operationalized the relational practices they had described.

Artifacts.

Within qualitative research, artifacts are often used to supplement information gathered during interviews and observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018) and can include both documents and audiovisual materials (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I collected artifacts that pertained to the student-teacher relationship. On several occasions the focal teachers provided me with artifacts about themselves (write up in the school paper) or about their students (texts that had been

exchanged or copies of papers or art work that had been produced by focal students). I also collected my own artifacts while I was in the school –whether it was capturing description of the artwork on the wall or snapping pictures of the teacher of the year article I found in the office that highlighted one of the focal teachers. The collection of artifacts allowed me to gain additional insight into the school, the focal teachers, the focal students, and the nature of specific student-teacher relationships.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this project was ongoing and iterative since "the process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process – they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.185). After each interview, I wrote analytic memos to make connections across interviews, to identify trends or themes that were starting to emerge, and to identify areas that I wanted to follow up on. For example, after Mr. Fitzgerald mentioned the concept of "shoulder to shoulder" instruction, I began to pay closer attention to how each of the focal teachers physically positioned themselves in relation to students when working one-on-one. Treating data analysis as an iterative process allowed me to identify themes and patterns in early interviews and observations, so I could later use that data to inform subsequent observations and interviews. For example, in many of the first round student interviews, I noted that students who were not being interviewed about Mr. Nelson made mention of him as they described their positive experiences with teachers at the school. After noting this in my memo, I made the decision to more concretely seek their perspectives on Mr. Nelson during the second round of student interviews. Additionally, these initial insights allowed me to create tentative profiles of each focal teacher that I

was able to present to students in order to member check that my description of the teacher matched up with their description (see profiles in Appendix D).

As is characteristic of data analysis in collective case studies, data analysis for this study occurred in two stages: within case analysis and cross-case analysis. For the first stage, within case analysis, I analyzed each individual case as "a comprehensive case in and of itself" (Merriam, 1998, p.195). In the second stage, cross-case analysis, I analyzed the data across all three cases to identify similarities and differences. In the section below I describe the analysis processes. I begin with a description of the process for within case analysis and then explain the cross-case analysis. An overview of the process of analysis can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4
Stages of data analysis

Stage	Research Question (Phase)	Coding & Analysis
Within-Case	Research Question #1 (Phase 1)	1st Cycle: Open process coding of the actions teachers took to initiate and maintain productive relationships with Black male students 2nd Cycle: Pattern coding to determine the essential relational practices employed by each teacher.
	Research Question #2 (Phase 2)	1st Cycle: Deductive coding using the dimensions of identity – race, gender, life experience, and institutional role. 2nd Cycle: Pattern coding to determine which practices were influenced by dimensions of teacher's identity
Cross-Case Analysis	Research Question #1 (Phase 1)	Data matrix of focal teachers' essential practices.
	Research Question #2 (Phase 2)	Data matrix of ways the essential practices were influenced by the dimensions of each teacher's identity.

Stage one: within case analysis.

To prepare for the first stage of analysis, I organized each case as a separate project within Nvivo. Within each project, I gathered the data related to that case: the focal teacher's interviews, the focal students' interviews, and the field notes from my observations. Since the number and type of artifacts varied from teacher to teacher, I did not include artifacts in the original coding but returned to them to support the themes once they had been determined through the coding process. Once I had collected and organized the data, I began the individual analysis for each case. For each case, I analyzed my two research question separately.

Phase one: Research question #1. I first analyzed the data through the lens of my first research question: *How do teachers at a racially and socio-economically diverse high-school initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students?* I began the analysis for this question by performing an initial cycle of open coding using Nvivo software. During this initial cycle I used process codes to capture the actions the focal teachers took to initiate and maintain productive student teacher relationships with their Black male students. Process codes "use gerunds exclusively to connote action in the data. Simple observable action (reading, playing, watching TV, drinking coffee) and more general conceptual action (struggling, negotiating, surviving, adapting) can be coded as such through a process code" (Saldana, 2016, p.111). Thus process codes were an appropriate initial method to capture the teachers' actions in the data. The process codes I used during this first cycle of coding were either informed by the tenets of working alliance theory (ex. working alongside) and a praxis of politicized care (ex. maintaining high expectations) or developed from the

data as strictly inductive codes (ex. intruding intentionally, offering opportunities for redemption, sharing yourself). This first cycle of process coding resulted in 31 codes for Mr. Fitzgerald (ex. establishing trust, allowing opportunities for redemption), 33 codes for Mrs. Compass (ex. intruding intentionally, exuding positivity), and 30 initial codes for Mr. Nelson (ex. counseling, paying attention) (see full list of codes in Appendix E).

After I assembled the initial list of process codes, I organized the data within each case by eliminating codes that were redundant or minimally supported by the data and combining codes that captured similar constructs. This process narrowed my list of codes to 23 for Mr. Nelson, 20 for Mrs. Compass, and 21 for Mr. Fitzgerald (see list of codes in Appendix E).

I then analyzed this code list to identify patterns and to group related codes into broader categories. This pattern coding allowed me to pull together the process codes from the first cycle of coding and begin to identify emergent themes (Saldana, 2016, p. 236). Once I had identified several potential themes, I returned to the full data set to read through it again and flesh out each category (Merriam, 1998). Once I had fleshed out the categories, I examined the data to determine the frequency of codes in each category as well as the number of sources that had mentioned a concept encompassed within that category. This process helped me narrow the list of categories to a list of five to six themes for each case; each theme described a relational approach regularly implemented by the focal teacher. Through this process I identified six relational practices for Mrs. Compass and Mr. Nelson and five relational practices for Mr. Fitzgerald related to research question one. Table 5 provides an overview of these practices.

Table 5

Themes: Teachers' primary practices for initiating and maintaining relationship with their Black male students.

Mrs. Compass	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Nelson
1. Interacting with students in a humanizing manner	1. Interacting with students in a humanizing manner	1. Interacting with students in a humanizing manner
2. Preparing students for short and long term success.	2. Preparing students for short and long term success	2. Preparing students for short and long term success
3. Engaging students as active participants in their own learning	3. Engaging students as active participants in their own learning	3. Engaging students as active participants in their own learning
4. Noticing and naming race-based issues	4. Creating space for conversations about race	4. Transparency: sharing his story, having honest conversations, and candidly discussing race
5. Being a consistent positive presence in students' lives	5. Providing students opportunities for redemption	5. Actively participating in the school community
6. Taking an asset-based approach that prioritizes growth		6. Mentoring students

Phase two: Research question #2. Once I completed the within case analysis for research question one, I performed a second phase of within case analysis guided by my second research question: *How does a teacher's identity - particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role - influence the way they initiate and maintain relationships with their Black male students?* During this phase, I deductively coded the data for instances where a teacher's relational practices derived during the first phase of within case analysis appeared to be influenced by a dimension of the teacher's identity. I used the dimensions of identity described in the conceptual framework: race, gender, life experience, and institutional role as the deductive codes for this phase of coding. Since the primary purpose of this phase of analysis was to examine how these

dimensions of identity influenced the practices derived from the analysis of research question one, I re-coded the data units situated within each practice rather than coding the original data set in its entirety. For example, Darius's statement that Mr. Nelson "guides the Black students" would have been a data unit coded as the practice "mentoring" during phase one. In phase two this data unit would have been given a supplementary code of "race" to indicate that the practice of mentoring was partially informed by Mr. Nelson's race.

Once I completed the coding, I then examined the data to identify patterns that indicated a dimension of the teacher's identity was significantly impacting their approach to a relational practice. This process allowed me to draw conclusions about whether and how a specific dimension of teacher's identity influenced their approach to the relational practices they used to initiate and maintain relationships with their Black male students. For instance, I noted that Mrs. Compass's ability to place a primary focus on student growth was facilitated by her role as the co-director of academic support since in this role she did not have to assign grades to students.

Stage two: cross-case analysis.

Similar to the within case analysis, I conducted the cross-case analysis in two phases based on the two research questions for the study.

Phase one: Research question #1. Once I performed the within case analysis for each of my focal teachers to determine the prevalent relational practices they individually employed, I put the practices for all three cases into a data matrix (see Table 6) in order to determine the similarities and differences between cases (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I found that the three teachers all used four common practices when initiating and

maintaining relationships with their Black male students: 1) interacting with students in a humanizing manner 2) willingly engaging with students in conversations about race, 3) engaging students as active participants in their own learning, and 4) preparing students for long and short term success. Additionally, Mr. Nelson & Mrs. Compass shared the practice of being consistently present in students' school lives. Finally, each teacher also had at least one practice that was either entirely unique to them or that was much more prevalent for them than it was for the other focal teachers: Mr. Nelson - transparency and mentoring, Mrs. Compass - unconditional positive regard and a focus on growth, and Mr. Fitzgerald - allowing opportunities for redemption.

Table 6

Data matrix for cross-case analysis of research question #1

	Mrs. Compass	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Nelson
Common Themes			
Interacting with student in a humanizing manner.	X	X	X
Preparing students for short and long term success	X	X	X
Engaging students as active participants in their own learning	X	X	X
Engaging with students in conversation about race	Noticing and naming race-based issues	Creating space for conversation about race	Candidly discussing race
Being consistently present in students' school lives	Being a consistent positive presence in students' school lives		Actively participating in the school community
Unique Themes			
Prioritizing growth	X		
Allowing opportunities for redemption		X	
Transparency/sharing his story			X
Mentoring students			X

Research question #2. Once I had identified the practices that were shared by all three focal teachers or that were unique to each individual teacher, I returned to the data to address research question two and to explore how the teachers' shared and unique practices were influenced by dimensions of their identity. I created a second data matrix (see Table 7) to ascertain how the different dimensions of the teacher's identity influenced their enactment of the relational practices identified in phase one of the cross-case analysis. I then looked for patterns in the data to determine if there were similarities and differences in how certain dimensions of identity influenced particular practices across all teachers.

Through the two phases of cross case analysis, I was not only able to see what practices teachers shared in common but was also able to see how these practices were enacted slightly differently by each teacher based on certain dimensions of their identities. Additionally, looking at the data in two phases helped me to examine whether each of the teacher's unique practices was also to some extent informed by certain aspects of their identity.

Table 7

Cross-case analysis for research question #2

Practice	Race	Gender	Life Experience	Role
Interacting with students in a humanizing manner	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson		Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson
Engaging in conversations about race with students	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson
Engaging students as active participants in their own learning	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson
Preparing students for short and long term success	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson
Being consistently present in students' school lives			Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Compass Mr. Fitzgerald Mr. Nelson
Transparency	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson
Mentoring students	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson	Mr. Nelson
Prioritizing growth				Mrs. Compass
Providing students opportunities for redemption	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Fitzgerald	Mr. Fitzgerald

Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor of this study, I implemented many procedures to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study: triangulation, member checks, prolonged engagement in the field, and rich, thick description of data. In the section below I describe in greater details the procedures within each of these methods.

Triangulation.

In qualitative research and particularly in case study research, triangulation is commonly employed to increase the validity of a study. Triangulation requires that the

"findings are supported by more than one single source of evidence" (Yin, 2014, p.121). To triangulate the data, the researcher must use multiple methods of collecting data as well as multiples sources to confirm prevalent codes and prominent themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Within each instrumental case, I employed two methods of triangulation: multiple methods of data collection and multiple data sources. To determine the most significant relational practices employed by each teacher, I used teacher interviews, student interviews, classroom observations, and in some cases artifacts. Thus for each focal teacher I had at least four and sometimes five different perspectives on which to base my analysis: the teacher's perspective, the perspectives of the two to three focal students for each teacher, and my own observations. During data analysis, when determining the most prevalent themes for each teacher, I used triangulation to prioritize those practices that were identified in multiple data sources. In addition to triangulating the data across sources, Yin (2014) explains that triangulation occurs when a researcher has "queried the same participant several times" (p.122). During the course of this study, each teacher was interviewed three times, and several questions were repeated or rephrased during each of these interviews in order to provide verification and clarification. Additionally, all focal students were interviewed twice. These multiple formal interviews allowed me to confirm initial interpretations with participants and helped to increase the validity and rigor of the study.

Member checks.

Member checks are a common practice in qualitative research. During a member check, the researcher takes their interpretation of the raw data back to the participants in order to ensure the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998).

For this study, I performed two distinct phases of member checks. The first phase involved a member check with the focal students. After I had interviewed all of the focal students about a particular teacher, I drafted a short profile for each focal teacher that summarized what I had learned about the teacher from the students collectively (see profiles in Appendix D). During my second interview with each student, I presented the student with this profile, asked him to read it, and invited him to identify any information he believed was inaccurate or had been misinterpreted as well as any important characteristics of the focal teacher he felt I had failed to capture. This process served two purposes. First, it allowed me to verify that I had interpreted the information correctly. Second, it helped me to review the insights I had gleaned about the focal teacher from one student with the other focal students for that teacher, so I could corroborate those interpretations.

In the second phase of member checks, after I had analyzed all the data and written a draft of the findings, I sent each of the focal teachers the section of the findings chapter that pertained to them, so they could review it. I invited the teachers to comment on any areas where they felt their words had been misinterpreted or needed to be clarified. All three teachers reviewed the materials and responded either to confirm the findings or to provide slight clarification on particular points.

Prolonged engagement in the field.

Between October 2018 and April 2019, I spent approximately twenty days at Corby High School, averaging three visits to the school each month; these visits ranged from short visits that lasted only an hour or two to longer visits where I spent five or six hours at the school. In between visits to the school, I kept in contact with the focal

teachers via email, text, and phone. While I often visited the school for a particular formal purpose – student interviews, focal teacher interviews, or observations – I also frequently engage in informal visits to and interactions with both the focal teachers and the focal students on the days I was at the school regardless of whether I was there to specifically meet with them that day. In addition to my interactions with the focal teachers and focal students, I also frequently checked in with a graduate school colleague, who was a teacher at Corby and had helped me to gain access to the site. He acted as an informal informant who often provided me with insight into the inner workings of Corby. This prolonged engagement in the field helped to increase the validity of the study because it allowed me to build rapport with participants and to gain a better understanding of the school context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998). My prolonged engagement at Corby High School allowed me to develop a relationship with each of my focal teachers, to engage with them in more informal conversations, and to observe their more informal interactions with students outside of the windows in which I was formally observing them. For instance, I was able to confirm many of the interview details about Mr. Nelson's interactions with students simply by walking with him from the main office to the art room during lunch one day.

Thick descriptive data.

Finally, qualitative researchers are charged with providing thick, descriptive data "so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, where finding can be transferred" (Merriam, 1998, p.211). By including an in-depth description of each of the focal teachers using multiple verbatim quotes from the teacher and their students, as well as detailed descriptions from my

observation field notes, I have attempted to create a holistic picture of each teacher from which the reader can draw their own conclusions.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research findings and interpretations are always filtered through the lens of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998). As a researcher, my own experiences impacted the questions I asked, the way I framed the study and interpreted the data, and what I ultimately determined to be significant. I come to this research as a White woman who was educated from kindergarten through graduate school in predominately White Catholic institutions. I then went on to spend eleven years teaching in Catholic middle schools, nine in an all-boys middle school whose student body consisted almost entirely of students of color, primarily Black boys. It was my experience teaching at my former school that brought me to this work. During my time teaching there, I received an education from my colleagues, my students and their parents that helped me to better understand the realities of the Black boys in my classroom and to become a more relationally effective teacher. My experience working with primarily Black boys also solidified my understanding of how essential relationships are to student success. My prior experiences as both a student and a teacher not only impacted the lens through which I interpreted the data but also influenced the formation of my overarching research questions as well as my site selection for this research.

Throughout the course of the study, I tried to remain cognizant of my position as a White woman and how my position might impact how I interpreted what participants shared with me or the things that I observed. Recognizing that my race, gender, and position as a former teacher may influence how I viewed teachers' relational practices

with Black male students, I intentionally chose to solicit Black male students' perspectives on the relationships. In doing so I hoped to position the students in the study as active agents in the relationship rather than as objects that teachers acted upon. In addition, I tried to counteract any of my personal bias through transparency around my intentions and my process, open dialogue with my participants, and the use of member checks. In particular, I engaged in dialogue with both Mr. Nelson and the students around the terminology used to describe Black male students to ensure it was an accurate representation of how they identified.

Despite efforts to solicit the view of Black male students themselves, I recognize that ultimately my position still affected what I saw, as well as how participants viewed me and the information they chose to disclose. I recognize that at times my presence altered the environments in which I observed. For instance, this was particularly salient in the art building where many students assumed when they saw a White woman in the corner on a laptop that I was there as some type of evaluative observer and thus at first tried to be on their best behavior. Students even questioned Mr. Nelson at one point if "the lady is still here?" Thus, my initial presence certainly altered the regular "vibe" or cultural of Mr. Nelson's classroom; however, it is my hope that through my prolonged engagement in the field, my inclusion of multiple data sources which capture a variety of perspective on each teacher, and the rich, detailed description of that data, I am able to provide an accurate depiction of each teacher's practice and valuable insight into why these practices are effective.

Chapter 4: Findings

As I spent time with the three focal teachers and their students over the course of the 2018-2019 school year, I confirmed what had been initially indicated in the senior exit interviews that I had used to help me to select my participants: all three teachers were able to forge productive working alliances with their Black male students. The interview and observational data collected for this project provided a more in depth understanding of the students' responses to the exit interview question and allowed me to not only hear why teachers mattered to students, but to also uncover how and why the focal teachers were able to consistently establish strong relationships with Black male students. During data analysis, I identified prevalent themes for each teacher that highlighted how they were able to initiate and maintain relationships with their Black male students. While many of these themes overlapped for all of the teachers, there were also themes that were unique and distinctive to each teacher.

In this section, I first present the within case findings for each separate case. Each case description begins with a participant profile that provides an overview of that teacher and paints a broad picture of their relational practices. I then present the findings for my first research question: *How do teachers at a racially and socio-economically diverse high-school initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students?* Finally, each case descriptions ends with the findings related to my second research question: *How does a teacher's identity - particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role, -influence the way they initiate and maintain relationships with their Black male students?*

After presenting the findings for each individual case, I report the findings from the cross-case analysis, which identifies where the teachers' practices and approaches

overlap and where they diverge. I conclude the section by presenting my findings on the overall influence of teachers' identity on their relational practices and the overall approach to building relationships with their Black male students.

Mrs. Compass

"It's just the craziest thing because it's just the smallest classroom literally in the corner of the school and it has the biggest impact on every student in the school." - Darius

Participant profile.

It's a Friday morning and when I pull into the parking lot at Corby High School, it is mostly empty; on this chilly December morning the sun has yet to rise. I park and make my way up to the academic support room located in the center of the main hall, but at the same time tucked away up top behind the old gym. The school day has not started yet, and the gym itself is low-lit, quiet, and empty. I climb the stairs, and as I round the corner, I see the warm glow of the academic support room; its front walls have several big windows, which make it easy to see into the well-lit room. Through the glass I see Mrs. Compass and four students. It is 7:15am, and she informs me that some of them have been here since 6am preparing for a math test later today.

The room itself is simply furnished. On one side sits a built-in bookshelf filled with textbooks for the various classes offered at the school. The walls are lined with white boards – the remnants of past days remain on some of them – a web of organic compounds on one – the conjugation of Spanish verbs on another. Besides the white boards, there is not much on the walls – one wall is covered with photos of bright flowers and on a beam at the front of the room is a sign that reads, "Memory is the residue of thought." The seating in the room consists of eight skinny tables each accompanied by

three chairs and a few tall triangular tables pushed into the corners of the room to eke out some extra seats. It appears each piece of furniture has been intentionally chosen to maximize occupancy in the small space.

Mrs. Compass floats through the room moving from student to student, calmly, patiently, intentionally. She is a White woman in her mid-60s with brown shoulder length hair she wears down, sometimes slightly pulled back by her glasses as they sit on top of her head (Observation #1 Field Notes 12/14/18).

Mrs. Compass grew up in the Boston suburbs in a large family of ten, which includes her brother, who is Black and was trans-racially adopted. She later adopted six children of her own, four of whom are Black young men.

Mrs. Compass joined the staff of Corby High School ten years ago as their co-director of academic support. She has helped to slowly grow the academic support program over time. Academic support at Corby is entirely voluntary, but the small room is packed to capacity most days as students willingly come to Mrs. Compass and her colleagues to get the help they need. The first morning I observed, 26 students came through academic support in the hour before school; 16 of whom were Black. During subsequent lunchtime observations, I noted 18 students on one day, 15 of whom were Black, and 25 students on another day, 16 of whom were Black. During those periods, students filtered in and out of the room some staying the entire period and others staying just long enough to get the help they needed (Observation Field Notes 12/14, 3/8, & 4/16). While underclassmen were at times intimidated by the space and timid about asking for help, the upper classmen appeared to be regulars in the room. Mrs. Compass served all students in academic support, but it was evident she looked out for the Black

male students who come to the room daily, many who were at first unfamiliar with the rigor of a parochial school, and she supported them and conveyed to them that she knew they were capable of being successful at Corby.

As I watched Mrs. Compass in action on that first morning, Darius came to the door and asked Mrs. Compass to come into the hallway. He revealed to her that he had just found out that he had gotten into his first choice college and had come to thank her for everything she had done to make it possible. Mrs. Compass responded to his announcement with genuine joy (Observation Field Notes 12/14/18). It was clear that she and Darius had a strong relationship and that he credited that relationship with preparing him to meet his future goals, but how did it get to this point? What did Mrs. Compass do that made Darius willing to step into that relationship with her?

After speaking with Anthony, Darius, and Malcom (three focal students who regularly worked with Mrs. Compass in academic support), interviewing Mrs. Compass herself, and observing the academic support space, I identified six practices Mrs. Compass employed to build and maintain her relationships with her Black male students: 1) she interacted with students in a humanizing manner; 2) she was a consistent positive presence in students' school lives; 3) she took an asset-based approach that prioritized growth; 4) she prepared students for short and long term success; 5) she engaged students as active participants in their own learning; and 6) she noticed and named race-based issues. Below, I describe these practices in more depth in hopes of providing a clear picture of not only what Mrs. Compass set out to do but also how she did it.

Practice #1: Interacting with students in a humanizing manner.

"She accepts us for who we are." – Darius

Mrs. Compass has been successful in consistently forming productive relationship with her Black male students because she demonstrates a politicized care for them by getting to know them as people rather than automatically making certain assumptions about them based on their race and gender, and by recognizing and affirming their potential.

Mrs. Compass initiated relationships with her Black male students by simply acknowledging their presence. Any time a student entered the academic support space for the first time, she went over to the student to welcome him and introduce herself. She described,

> I sometimes just observe on day one because I don't want to seem too much in their face…I usually will go over and introduce myself to him and say, "I'm glad you're here" because I want to know who he is (Compass Interview #3, 3/15/19).

Thus, her relationship with students always began with her demonstrating politicized care for students through her simple acknowledgement that "I see you."

After she made the initial introduction, she then slowly built trust with students by also recognizing and affirming those students who regularly attended academic support. Malcolm explained, "She notices everyone that is there… And she notices people that come back, and come back often. And she knows that no matter how packed the room is she will find a way to help you" (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/19). Malcolm felt seen in the academic support space – not just because Mrs. Compass noticed when he was present, but because she also validated his commitment to improvement.

When I observed academic support, it was evident that Mrs. Compass made an intentional effort to ensure she provided the necessary support for those students who frequently visited the academic support room. In addition to the focal students, there were several students I noticed who were in academic support on most or all of the occasions when I observed or stopped by the room. During my final observation, one of these students was working on a math assignment with which he seemed to be having difficulty. Even though there were eighteen students in the room, and Mrs. Compass was circulating to support them all, I saw her intentionally check in with this particular student at least five times to ensure he was on the right track, felt comfortable with the work, and got the support he needed (Observation #3 Field Notes, 4/16/2019). By making sure she attended to the students who came to academic support often, Mrs. Compass was able to maintain her relationships by adopting a praxis of politicized care that showed her students that she respected and acknowledged the steps they were taking to improve and made sure they got the necessary support and encouragement to make those desired improvements.

Once Mrs. Compass had established the initial connection with individual students, she strengthened her relationships with her Black male students by getting to know not only their strengths and weaknesses as students but also who they were as people. She made a deliberate effort to get to know about her students' lives outside of school and to discover and support their multiple areas of talent. She frequently found time for small moments of connection or for more informal conversations with students where they discussed topics beyond academics. When describing his relationship with Mrs. Compass, Anthony claimed, "We always just talk about stuff other than school –

sports, my life outside of school, girls, stuff like that" (Anthony Interview #1 2/15/2019). These more informal conversations allowed Mrs. Compass to gather insight about her students and their personalities and are an important aspect of politicized care because they allow for an open dialogue through which teachers can learn about who their students are and what they need. This knowledge of her students was evident when I asked Mrs. Compass to describe each of the focal students; she seemed to not only have a sense of what they were like as students but also to have good insight into their personality and who they were as people. For example she described Darius as "there's a real genuineness about him;" "he's level-headed;" "he is very confident in a lovely way" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/19). She noticed these things about Darius and the other students and truly appreciated the different aspects that made each of her students unique.

She not only talked with students about their lives outside of school, but also frequently attended students' extracurricular events and acknowledged their non-academic talents. During one observation, I noticed her lean down and quietly tell a student, "The concert was incredible. I was there the other night, and it was just incredible" (Observation Field Notes #1 12/14/2018). She invested in her students as people and showed an interest in the things that mattered to them, and her students sensed how much she cared about them. Malcolm described, "She supports us wholly as athletes and also as students" (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/2019). Mrs. Compass took this more holistic view of all her students, but it was perhaps of greater importance for her Black male students. Corby High School is known for its athletic program; many of their graduates have gone on to play division one sports in college, and several former students have had careers in both the NBA and NFL. Of the three seniors I interviewed about Mrs.

Compass, all played sports at Corby, and two had been recruited to continue playing sports in college. The students expressed a sense that as Black male athletes in society, people didn't always see them for the multi-faceted, multi-talented, honor roll students that they were, but instead reduced them to a one note: athlete. However, within the academic support room, they felt Mrs. Compass acknowledged and appreciated their well-roundedness as she showed enthusiasm for their success across multiple areas. For example, when Mrs. Compass described Anthony, she demonstrated her recognition of and appreciation for his multiple talents,

> I've watch that transition of, "I'm not going to show anybody this." to "I'm pretty proud of this now," which is a cool thing to see before they leave for college. He's got a tremendous drive academically. I think he's always had the drive athletically, but a drive now-- I can't remember what he did on his SATs, but he kind of blew the roof of his SATs, and surprised himself, I think. He was sort of shocked by it… They [Corby's varsity football team] had a phenomenal championship game… He [Anthony] was the one that ran for the touchdown at the end of the game… I watched him, and I thought, "He's not going to let anyone taking him down" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018).

As she provided insight on Anthony, Mrs. Compass expressed her appreciation of Anthony's tenacity as a football player, but also demonstrated that she was equally enthusiastic about how much he had improved as a student and the academic identity he had taken on.

In addition to recognizing her students many talents, Mrs. Compass also validated her Black male students by acknowledging the many challenges they faced in society and

the many stereotypes they had to regularly content with while at the same time demonstrating empathetic regard and genuine respect for her students. Darius provided insight into how Mrs. Compass validated her Black male students' humanity when he responded to a questions I asked him about why he believed so many Black students voluntarily chose to spend time in academic support. He explained:

> She's not just an educator. She's a counselor, a shoulder to cry on. She's always there no matter what you go through, and she'll make it personal. She's taken all of us into her family, it seems like. I think that's why so many Black people go there because in a world where we're targeted by just it seems as though every person we meet, she doesn't. She accepts us for who we are - all our flaws. She takes us in, helps us. She's definitely not just an academic support. She's not just a teacher or an educator or anything like that. She's really just an open door (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

According to Darius, Mrs. Compass saw him and all her student for who they were, not for what the world told her they should be. As a Black adolescent male in America, Darius felt that he was too often not seen for himself but rather seen as a stereotypical representation of everyone who shared his race and gender. In an essay Darius wrote for his African American Experience class, he spoke about his experience as a Black adolescent male. He wrote,

> My being in shape fits me into a positive category among mythical norms. Although I am stronger than I was, it seems as though I am more threatening. Wearing a hoodie at night and simply walking makes people (white and black) suspicious of me and cross the street. No matter what I do to change myself, I will

always be praised and targeted at the same time (Darius essay).

While Darius often felt targeted by the larger world and many of his teachers, he felt Mrs. Compass accepted him for who he was. Through her actions, she demonstrated to Darius and her other Black male students that she saw beyond the common stereotypes ascribed to them. At the same time, she recognized that to see her Black male students meant she must acknowledge the inherent role race and racism play in their daily lives and the multiple instance of discrimination they may face both in the wider society and she admitted even at Corby High School. She told me, "I think a lot of our African-American kids feel that there are lots of White teachers here that are still racially biased" (Compass Interview #3, 3/15/2019). In recognition of this common perception, Mrs. Compass tried to communicate a different message to her students. She did not claim to be color-blind because she realized that her students' Blackness was an integral part of their identity, but at the same time she humanized her students by appreciating that their race was neither a negative nor an all-encompassing aspect of their identity. Her ability to acknowledge societal challenges and recognize her students' humanity were essential components of Mrs. Compass's praxis of politicized care and helped her create a foundation for productive relationship with her Black male students.

Mrs. Compass also affirmed her students' humanity through her unwavering belief in their potential. Mrs. Compass believed it was particularly important to demonstrate her belief in her Black male students because so many of them had received both implicit and explicit messages from society that there were incapable of academic success. Reflecting on the experience of her Black male students she stated,

> They've all felt the surprise, if you speak Standard English, the surprise if you do well in school, the surprise if you actually play a musical instrument: all those things. So I tend to work with so many kids who come in very rough around the edges. And I know that they have thought their whole lives that they're not smart, and all they have to do is shut up and be well-behaved sometimes to get that good grade. And so, it takes a long time to change that perception of themselves. And I think I change it by demanding, and at the same time, being there to help every step of the way (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2019).

Mrs. Compass worked to provide her Black male students with an alternate message about their potential from the ones they got from the media and society. Mrs. Compass shared a story about a conversation she had with Anthony concerning his SAT score,

> I can't even remember what he got on his SATs, but he came to tell me-- I think I was working after school or something, and he came later to tell me, so I think there was almost no one there. He was so proud, and I wanted to make sure that I wasn't proud of the score, you know what I mean? Like I said to him, I'm not surprised at all. He was like, "Can you believe that I did that?" I said, "I'm really not surprised." He said, "Mrs. Compass, it's so much higher than I ever," and I said, "It's just all there" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2019).

Mrs. Compass was conscious in this moment to communicate to Anthony her belief that his score was not an anomaly but rather a small representation of his incredible potential, which she noticed every day. I saw her similarly affirm a student who had gotten a low score on his PSAT. He walked into the room and handed Mrs. Compass a paper and stated, “I got my PSAT yesterday – I am the dumbest person here.” She looked at the

paper and replied, “This is just one day. You just don’t know where you were that day.” (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/14/18). Whether the score was positive or negative, Mrs. Compass refused to allow a test score to define her students or their potential.

Mrs. Compass’s recognition of students as inherently worthy laid the foundation for her to initiate and maintain productive meaningful relationships with her Black male students because she made them feel seen and accepted for who they are.

Practice #2: Being a consistent positive presence in students’ school lives.

“She is a blessing to be around.” - Anthony

Mrs. Compass maintained strong relationships with her Black male students because during their time at Corby, she was a consistent positive presence, who was regularly available and willing to support them.

“Always happy,” “bundle of joy,” “that aunt you really like,” “always warm”, “compassionate,” “never really complains about anything,” “an angel,” “a blessing to be around” - these are the phrases the focal students used to describe Mrs. Compass. One of the reasons Mrs. Compass was successful in maintaining her relationship with her Black male students was that she exuded positivity – students felt good about themselves when they were around her. Anthony described her as “just a friendly person who is there for you, who wants the best for you, who brings that joy to you every single day” (Anthony Interview #2, 4/10/2019). Mrs. Compass believed in her students’ ability to succeed, and they not only knew it –they felt it.

Mrs. Compass had a keen awareness of how easily students could be turned off when they perceived that someone was approaching them from a place of anger, disgust, or judgement. Thus, she intentionally made a choice each day to be positive in order to

best serve her students. She told me, “I know part of the reason that it also works in there is that I'm incredibly positive. I'm smiling all the time. I feel like I'm almost never in a bad mood with them because they sense that immediately” (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018). As a result of this philosophy, she constantly positioned herself as students’ cheerleader:

> I always tell parents they need to be the bad cop. I'm going to be the person, if they [students] haven't been here for three months, and they walk in with all F's, I'm the one that says, "We can fix this, we can help this” (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

Due to her positive outlook and her ability to always find the hope in a situation, students voluntarily attended academic support since in many other spaces they did not necessarily receive that same unconditional positive regard.

For most of the students who used academic support, Mrs. Compass had been a consistent presence throughout their high school experience. The students often felt that they needed to feel comfortable with anyone they would ask for help – and for many of them that took time. However, given their relationship with Mrs. Compass, they started each semester with someone who they already knew could and would help them. By simply showing up every day ready and willing to work with students, Mrs. Compass demonstrated her continued commitment to their success and opened up the avenue for a meaningful relationship.

The three focal students I interviewed about Mrs. Compass were seniors and had been attending academic support since freshman or sophomore year. They consistently and voluntarily came to academic support because of the trust and comfort they had

established with Mrs. Compass over an extended period of time. Mrs. Compass's consistent presence in their school lives and the fact that she rarely if ever said no to their requests for help made them more willing both to seek help and to take academic risks. Malcolm explained how his consistent interactions with Mrs. Compass helped him to see her as an essential source of support: "Through 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th, 12th, she's just always been consistent. Like teachers change, but Mrs. Compass, she gets to know you; she gets to know your strengths and weaknesses" (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/2019). All three students made similar comments and explained that they often sought help from Mrs. Compass rather than one of their teachers because she took the time to really know who they were and learn how to best support them individually.

Mrs. Compass was not only a consistent presence in the academic support room, but she was also "all in," immersing herself in the school community and making her presence felt in places that were important to students and where students excelled. She told me, "I've been to plenty of football games, plenty of basketball games. I go to the music concerts and stuff like that and the play, because I think they want that" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018). Mrs. Compass's attendance at these extracurricular events communicated to her students that she cared about them and was invested in them as people not just invested in their academic success. Malcom noted that Mrs. Compass's presence at events helped him create a strong connection with her:

> She's doing more than her job requires; her job doesn't require her to come support the people that she helps in academic support at their football game, at the basketball game, at their music concerts. It just allows you to trust her more when

> you know that she cares more about you than, you know, just inside that room (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/2018).

Like Malcolm, both Darius and Anthony also expressed how Mrs. Compass's investment in all areas of their school lives helped them to more openly engage with her because they recognized she was willing to go above and beyond what her job required to demonstrate how much she cared about them.

Mrs. Compass made herself available to help students whenever possible. She set her schedule to meet the demands of students' schedules rather than her personal preference. Mrs. Compass arrived at Corby each day an hour before school sometimes even earlier if a student had requested extra time; two days a week she stayed after school until 4:30pm, and it was not uncommon for Mrs. Compass to work extra hours on a weekend because a student had texted her that they needed help studying for a test the next day. All three focal students commented on how Mrs. Compass's availability communicated her commitment to them. Darius described,

> Perfect example of that would be like after school, she doesn't have to be here. She could go home at two fifty five or three o'clock when she wants to, but sometimes she'll stay until six o'clock like during parent teacher meetings and back to school night. She was here the entire night, meeting parents, and while the parents were walking around, she was helping kids with their homework (Darius interview #1, 1/24/2019).

Malcolm echoed this sentiment:

> She comes here early; she leaves late. She comes on our days off. We have film studies, like during football season on Sunday. She'll come on a Sunday. She'll

> come on a snow day. She's pretty much here for us. She doesn't ask for anything. She never says no to help (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

And Anthony also noted,

> She was just always there, like every day. I used to think does she have any days off – she's in there 24-7 every day...she really loves doing this. She really likes helping people so that helped the bond because I became more comfortable with her over time. … I have to be really comfortable because I don't really open up to too many people (Anthony Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

From Mrs. Compass's point of view, she did not view her time commitment as going above and beyond she instead viewed being both available and accessible as essential components of her job. She explained, "They can't feel like they can't ask me to come in on an extra day or something like that, they have to feel like I am accessible" (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018). She elaborated on this statement later telling me,

> So I know how much they want the structure. I know how much...They'll... Loads of kids will text me and ask me to come in on a Saturday or Sunday, and other teachers will think I'm crazy for doing that. But if a child asks you to come in, I mean if a young man asks you to come in on a Saturday or Sunday, they're screaming something to you, right? Like, "I want to do better" (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

Mrs. Compass's consistent willingness to sacrifice her personal time so she could honor students' requests for help strengthened her relationship with students because her students recognized her dedication as a sign of her investment in them and their futures. This sentiment seemed to be particularly true for her Black male students who in some

instances felt like their academic needs were being ignored. For instance, Anthony described the vibe he got from a few of his teachers at Corby that made him feel like they were not really invested in his education:

> "Do this by that time." "Sit down." "Do your work." "Don't say anything"…You try to ask a question - you get like this awkward answer, like that's a dumb question. That's really just teachers that are annoyed that they're here….Don't really want to help us learn (Anthony Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

Anthony recognized that some teachers would not go out of their way to help students, so he and the other students appreciated Mrs. Compass's availability and accessibility.

Mrs. Compass not only continually dedicated extra time to students but she also always did so willing. Through her positive attitude, Mrs. Compass communicated to students her genuine desire to be working with them. She never made them feel like her work with them was a burden, an inconvenience, or just a job. Darius told me, "She would never act like she was obliged to teach you or like she was being forced to teach you; she always seemed like she wanted to help people" (Darius Interview #1, 1/24/19). All three focal students acknowledged that they were more inclined to seek help from Mrs. Compass rather than their teacher for several reasons but one of the most prevalent was that while their teachers would help them, they at times treated the students' requests for help as an inconvenience, whereas Mrs. Compass made it seem like their request for help made her day.

Mrs. Compass was always in the moment with her students. Although each time I was in the academic support room I witnessed Mrs. Compass hustle from student to student in an endless flurry of activity, students never felt that her mind was elsewhere

when she was working with them or that she was in a rush to get to the next student. Darius explained, "No matter, how many people are in there, the entire student body could be in there if they could fit, and she would get to every single person" (Darius Interview #1, 1/24/2019). The first morning I visited academic support, I noticed how frequently she checked in with each student, getting students to a point where they felt comfortable and then letting them attempt to try the work on their own while she circulated the room and provided the same quick support to other students:

> As Mrs. Compass works one-on-one with a student on math at the white board, other students filter in and get right to work…Mrs. Compass starts circling the room. She leans over one student and asks, "Are you good?" as she glances at the work he is doing. She moves on – "What are you working on?" she asks another students – she moves her glasses from the top of her head to the front of her face and leans over the student's work – the student tells her he is working on an assignment that is coming up next week – "Everything ready for today?" she asks. "Is there a practice test for today? I want to make sure you are ready for today." The student confirms that yes, he is ready for today. "Good – it's good that you are working ahead," she tells him before going back to the student who she has left working on his math problem on the white board at the back of the room (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/14/2018).

During the forty-five minutes before school, twenty-six students came through academic support. In this time frame, Mrs. Compass had twenty-seven distinct interactions with students - some were quick check-ins and others were sustained interactions. She always seemed to have a pulse on which students she had left to work on something that they

would need to have checked and always ensured she circulated back to them after checking in with others. She explained her approach stating, “I want to give them help, and then enable them to do the next five or try the next five by themselves” (Compass Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Despite the many interactions she had with students within a short window of time, when she was working with a particular student, she stayed present in the moment. She often tailored her instruction to the individual student based on their needs and their prior knowledge rather than having a pre-determined answer that she gave to everyone. For example, one day in academic support, she worked extensively with a student on trying to understand radicals. He did not seem to be understanding, so she walked him over to the white board and drew a large wheel that represented the degrees of the radical and helped him walk through the problem using the wheel to help him solve it (Observation #3 Field Notes 4/16/2019). In this way she used two essential elements of politicized care, recognition and encouragement, to build productive relationships with her students.

Because Mrs. Compass was consistently available, accessible, and positive, her students felt they could count on her. Consequently, students willingly engaged in a relationship with her because they knew she would provide them with the academic and emotional support they needed to be successful. She was not just someone they interacted with for one semester or one year instead she was a steady reliable presence throughout their high school experience.

Practice #3: Taking an asset-based approach that prioritizes growth.

"We can't ever think a kid is finished."- Mrs. Compass

Mrs. Compass further expanded her productive relationship with her students because she took an asset-based approach to students that prioritized their growth. When working with students, she was patient with them, built upon what they already knew and could do, and helped them to frame failure as an opportunity for learning. She measured student success not through grades or test scores but through student progress and how their work and habits evolved over time. She told me, "I get to see the arc, the trajectory, and the trajectory is unbelievable" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2019). Given Mrs. Compass's role in academic support, she was able invest in students' long-term progress.

Mrs. Compass realized that not all students entered Corby High School with the same level of academic preparation or previous exposure to rigorous instruction. Therefore, she viewed one of the primary goals of her work as helping students to solidify their skills and fill in their academic gaps. Traditionally, students who come to Corby from local public elementary schools are less prepared for the demanding environment than their peers coming in from parochial or private elementary schools. At Corby a significant percentage of students coming from public school are Black, and thus, Mrs. Compass noticed that Black students often experienced a more difficult initial transition. She told me,

> For so many of them, the transition from middle school to Corby is really difficult if they're coming from public school, which a lot of our lower African-American kids are coming from, so the transition to Corby where they could have three or four quizzes every day is difficult (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018).

While some of the students I interviewed did not have this experience, Darius, among others, described how his initial experience at Corby fit with this description:

> Well, the middle school I went to didn't prepare me for private school and the types of things we would be doing here, and freshman year, I definitely didn't mold to it, but when I started going to her she helped me (Darius Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

For Darius and many of his classmates, Mrs. Compass was a vital support that helped them academically survive their first few years at Corby.

Mrs. Compass believed that all of the students she worked with were capable of doing the work and being successful at Corby, but she acknowledged "None of them do it right away, they work up to it" (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018). Filling in academic gaps can take time, and Mrs. Compass wanted students to stay engaged in the process. She knew struggling students could get overly discouraged by low grades that resulted from their academic gaps that in most cases existed due to no fault of their own, so she worked to highlight students' academic progress. She framed her students' learning gaps not as inherent inadequacies of the student, but rather as stages in the learning trajectory:

> These kids have all experienced failure. So my job isn't to have them experience failure and become resilient. My job is to show them that failure is not the end game for them, and failure just means the beginning of more growth (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

Mrs. Compass was patient with students and wanted students to be patient with themselves as they began to first change their study habits, then slowly improve their grades and overall GPAs, and finally change their outlook on learning and their

perceptions of their own academic capacities. She told me, “I want kids who have always seen themselves as substandard academically to know that’s not happening here….even if it take four years to get that first A” (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

Mrs. Compass encouraged students to spend the time and expend the effort needed to improve by highlighting their academic assets rather than the skills they lacked. During one observation, she told a student:

> “It looks like you are highlighting some good things – if that is one of the questions I want to do more than highlight it – I want to make a note in the margin.” She is side by side the student as they look at the article, and she demonstrates how he might annotate it (Observation #2 Field Notes, 3/8/2019).

In this example, she acknowledged that the student successfully identified the important information in the passage before she suggested he build upon those observations by including detailed marginal notes. This interaction was representative of the way Mrs. Compass consistently affirmed what students could do before providing them with recommendation on how they could improve. She told me that she viewed students who had a 50 or 60 on a test as having made an accomplishment – where they previously knew none of the information; they now had mastered 60% of it. She explained, “I have to say to them ‘You know two-thirds of the material. It’s not a failure’” (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018). Once she got students to recognize their areas of success, Mrs. Compass then helped them address the areas where they needed improvement. Through this combination of recognition, encouragement, and high expectations, she demonstrated her commitment to a praxis of politicized care.

Mrs. Compass's praxis of politicized care and asset-based approach was evident in an anecdote she shared about one of the freshmen she had been working with. One day another teacher who was helping in academic support reviewed the student's science essay. This teacher noticed that a good portion of the paper had been plagiarized and immediately began to chastise the student. She told him that if she was the teacher, and he handed that in, she would give him a zero and a Saturday detention for the plagiarism. The student, who had put a lot of effort into the paper, was distraught. When he questioned what he had done wrong, the teacher dismissively stated that he had stolen someone else's material.

The student had previously worked on parts of the paper with Mrs. Compass, so he went to ask her about the essay since he was still unclear on what he had done wrong. Mrs. Compass explained to the student:

> You did a great job. Probably on those paragraphs that I left you on your own, you did too much copying. You didn't really put it in your own words, because you didn't know what to say with your own words.

She then worked with the student on how to paraphrase and helped him to identify the areas where he needed to more thoroughly break down the information. What many teachers may have framed as cheating, Mrs. Compass saw as an indicator of a student not having been taught the skills necessary to successfully complete a task. The student later told Mrs. Compass, "Nobody's ever helped me write a paper like that before." And she told me that she went to the principal and told him, "Look, people have got to realize that less than half of a plagiarized paper for a low-skills freshman is an achievement - that means they wrote half the paper by themselves" (Compass interview #2, 12/10/2018).

Mrs. Compass's constant ability to see incremental growth allowed her to help students maintain a drive to improve even when they did not see immediate tangible results.

Mrs. Compass's asset-based approach made students more willing to work with her because she did not judge them. Malcolm explained that he was much more comfortable asking Mrs. Compass for help than some of his classroom teachers because "she's not going to say I taught you this last time or just to have more trust in her when you're doing your work, to say that you don't get it instead of feeling like, oh, if I tell you this, she's going to think I'm dumb or something" (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/2019). Many of the students I spoke with talked about their fear of stigma when they admitted they needed help within the classroom and thus they were more inclined to ask their questions and get help within academic support. While this anticipation of judgement may have been more in their perception than reality, the focus on growth over grades in academic support made students view Mrs. Compass as a less intimidating presence than many of their teachers and created a space where students felt comfortable being vulnerable and taking academic risks.

Mrs. Compass also hoped her focus on student progress would help her students adopt a growth mindset, so they would continue to push themselves regardless of the grades they received. She stated, "I love that I get the middle kids. The kids that are supposedly average kids, and I want them to think 'I am not average academically. I have all this growth potential in me'" (Compass Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Especially in regards to Black male students, schools can tend to mainly provide support through special education services or intervention programs that are often focused on students with diagnosed learning disabilities or those students who are most in danger of failing.

Rarely do schools offer Black male students supplemental support that is intended to help them academically thrive. Mrs. Compass, however, took a different approach to her work with Black male students; she saw her role as supporting students to reach their potential rather than as simply helping students to avoid failure. Speaking specifically about Anthony and Darius, Mrs. Compass stated, "They would have been B and C students, and they're A and B students. I feel like the middle is what always gets ignored" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018). Mrs. Compass wanted to ensure that at Corby the middle students were seen and pushed to reach their highest potential; this recognition of all students' capacities was a primary way she demonstrated politicized care for her students and laid the foundation for productive relationships with them.

All three focal students did not need to attend academic support to pass their classes, they wanted academic support to help them excel. They were there by choice and while at first they may have come because they felt lost in a class or overwhelmed by the demands of a new school – now, each senior I spoke to voluntarily attended academic support on a regular basis because Mrs. Compass helped bring out the best in them. Anthony detailed how Mrs. Compass helped him increase his overall GPA from a 2.6 to a 3.4 (Anthony Interview #1, 2/15/2018). Darius likewise explained,

> Freshman and sophomore year didn't really click too well, so I wasn't really doing that well. But junior year I started to get a lot more serious and focused and my grades shot up! I went from having, like a 2.5, 2.6 and 7 GPAs to being a dean's list, almost principal's list student, like honor roll every quarter - it wasn't really a question. And like I said before, Mrs. Compass really contributed to that success.

> I don't think I would be where I'm at without her (Darius Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

Because Mrs. Compass provided Anthony and Darius the space and support to develop their academic capacities, they both improved their grades. More importantly, they increased their sense of self-efficacy and developed a firmer belief in their own academic potential. I witnessed Mrs. Compass as she pushed one student in academic support to have more faith in his capabilities. She told him, "Why are you being so tentative about it – you are doing it right – you are right" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/14/2018). Mrs. Compass was constantly working to ensure students not only had the skills but also the confidence to be successful. Mrs. Compass thus maintained a productive relationship with her Black male students because the support she provided helped them to improve, feel capable, and experience academic success.

Practice #4: Preparing students for short and long-term success.

"She is very determined to see all of us succeed." - Darius

In her role as the co-director of academic support, Mrs. Compass provided students with the necessary academic support to be successful at Corby High School, but she also positioned herself as someone setting them up for life-long success both as learners and as people.

Mrs. Compass had a strong content mastery across multiple subject areas. This expansive knowledge allowed her to support her students in meeting the demands of their classes at Corby. On the days I visited academic support, I noticed her confidently support students on a variety of different assignments within math, science, Spanish, English, and history. Darius, Anthony, & Malcolm, each individually noted that "she

knows everything." While over time many of the students came to appreciate Mrs. Compass for much more than her vast knowledge, the focal students suggested that her reputation as someone who could help you in any academic subject was one of the reasons many students initially went to academic support. On those first visits, most students realized Mrs. Compass was knowledgeable and immensely supportive, and thus, they returned to academic support regularly and over time developed an authentic working relationship with Mrs. Compass. Malcolm explained,

> A lot of people come just to see…You know how people watch like Zion Williamson because they want to see how good he is. People come to see Mrs. Compass because they want to see how good she is….People realize she really does know a lot, she does everything, and they just keep coming back (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

Since students at Corby were not referred to academic support but instead attended academic support voluntarily, Mrs. Compass's ability to continually meet her students' academic needs was an essential component for maintaining her relationship with them. Mrs. Compass believed her job required her to be "educationally agile" and credited her liberal arts background for preparing her to provide students with support in multiple academic areas (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

While many teachers are knowledgeable, not all teachers know how to make that knowledge accessible to students. However, Mrs. Compass was adept at breaking down concepts in ways that ensured students truly understood. All three focal students noted that she was able to break down the material so that it made sense. Darius described, "She would explain it in ways that I would understand and then it would click" (Darius

Interview #1, 1/24/2019). Similarly, Malcolm claimed, "She would just make sure that when she leaves from helping you that you understand the work" (Malcolm Interview #1, 2/15/2019). As I observed academic support, I noticed her commitment to students' understanding in action:

> A student walks Mrs. Compass through his math process, and she confirms the steps as he goes. She reminds him that 'you actually have two answers – one is positive 21 and one is negative 21. She continues to have him walk through problems as she watches. At certain points she stops him to ask a question and ensure he is correctly applying the steps. She does not move on until he has successful answered multiple problems" (Observation #3 Field Notes, 4/16/2019).

Mrs. Compass guided the student toward the answer for the first problem and then stayed to ensure he had understood her explanation and could apply it on his own.

In the academic support room, this type of support where Mrs. Compass helped to ensure a student understood and could apply a specific concept was common. Mrs. Compass often helped her students to prepare for the upcoming tests, quizzes, and papers that filled their daily lives at Corby. The walls of academic support were covered in white boards – that on the days I visited were filled with a variety of study aids for different classes: Invisible Man characters, chemical bonds, examples of Spanish conjugations (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/14/2018). When she moved around the room, she examined the students' work and provided them with quick fixes or strategies. She questioned one student as he worked on his Spanish:

> Mrs. C: "So this is going to say?"
>
> Student: "Los."

> Mrs. C: “Good. You are going to keep this one lo, and this one is the directive so what is it going to be?”
>
> Student: “Le.”
>
> Mrs. Compass: “So le lo becomes se.”
>
> She then reviews the Spanish pronoun rules with the student before instructing him to do several more practice questions (Observation #2, Field Notes, 3/8/2019).

In this instance she not only ensured the student could get the right answer to this particular question but she also ensured he had a firm command of the rule, so he could apply it to any question on his upcoming test.

On another occasion, she affirmed a student’s effort and checked to make sure he was on the right track and working towards adequately completing the assignment. She looked at one student’s math work: “For these, do they cancel out, ooh, very good, I was going to distribute first, but you are right, you could cancel – good look” (Observation #2 Field Notes, 3/8/2019). Again, in this instance, she focused much more on the process and emphasized the student’s use of the strategy rather than his answer.

Mrs. Compass’s daily support helped many of her students better understand the material and prepared them to be successful in class that day or perhaps even that week or semester. Many students needed this consistent support to build both their skills and their confidence. Mrs. Compass noted that providing students with this type of last minute support could help them increase their GPAs, which she often saw as a necessary first step in supporting students’ long term academic success. She described how she witnessed this trajectory in certain students like Darius:

> He'd be a kid that was totally focused on his GPA when you wanted him to get beyond that, he had to get through that first, and it was perfectly fine for him to be competitive with himself, and he asked me often, "Can we look at my grades again? Can we see what I'm doing?" The kids have to move through that before they can get, "I'm fine" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018).

Mrs. Compass hoped her students would get beyond a preoccupation with grades and develop a deeper love of learning, but she also realized how important grades were to students. She recognized that students' concerns about grades demonstrated their investment in school, and over time she worked with them to cultivate that investment into a deeper love of learning. By recognizing and accepting where students were in their learning trajectory and then supporting students as they incrementally moved toward their academic goals, Mrs. Compass demonstrated a praxis of politicized care by honoring each student's unique academic needs.

In her role, Mrs. Compass often focused on students' short-term academic survival, but the seniors I interviewed told me that her impact was much more profound than simply helping them to complete a task for class. The students recognized that with her support they had developed important academic habits and transferable skills. Darius described that Mrs. Compass had not only helped him reach the goal of improving his GPA, but that with her help, he could now "read deeper, write deeper, be more intuitive. She's helped with my grammar a lot and made me more fluent in the ways of writing" (Darius Interview #1, 1/24/2019). All three focal students believed that they would take what they had learned from Mrs. Compass into college and were confident that the skills

they had learned during their time in academic support would set them up for future success. Malcom noted,

> She just wants to make sure that she stays on us so that we continue the habits that we've learned here – that it goes on to college, where they may not have someone who's as good as Mrs. Compass was or has the amount of time to dedicate to one person, but the things, she taught us here like study habits and things like that, we take that to college to make sure that even though she's not there physically, she has prepared us for college (Malcolm Interview #2, 4/16/2019).

Anthony echoed this sentiment,

> She taught me how to get ahead of the game really. Don't wait until the last minute to do an assignment or if you know you have an assignment that's due in two weeks, why not do it like a couple of days after it's assigned, so you won't have to worry about rushing or something like that. I would just say time management really. That's what I'm going to need the most and that's what she's told me since I'm going to be a student-athlete. I'm going to need to know how to choose my time wisely (Anthony Interview #2, 4/10/2019).

Mrs. Compass not only provided students the skills (study skills, time management, note tacking, annotating, paraphrasing, memory techniques) they needed to be academically successful in the future, but she also helped them develop self-advocacy skills. She hoped her students would leave Corby with the understanding that vulnerability can be a strength and with the self-awareness to know when they needed help and the confidence to ask for it. She explained that many of her freshmen won’t ask for help, but that by senior year they usually had no qualms about it.

By April, the three focal students, all seniors, used academic support less frequently or at least differently. Rather than coming to Mrs. Compass in a last minute panic, afraid that they might fail – they were there proactively to have an extra set of eyes on something, to remove themselves from distractions and have a quiet space to work during the school day, or to ask pointed questions about an assignment. As a second semester senior, Anthony stated, “I can really handle everything on my own, so I am not in academic support as much as before” (Anthony, Interview #2, 4/20/2019). Mrs. Compass confirmed that Anthony used academic support less this semester than in past semester and explained,

> Now, he can probably come for 15 minutes, and just ask me the three math questions that he didn't get. That's the change too. He's not necessarily there for 55 minutes, he's like, "I did all of them, but I couldn't get this one, this one, and this one. Can you help me with those?" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018).

Anthony’s ability to work independently and his ability to seek out help as needed demonstrated the strong preparation he had for his upcoming freshman year in college.

In providing her students with the supports and skills necessary for short and long-term success, Mrs. Compass not only prepared her students academically, but also ensured they could take full advantage of opportunities that were presented to them. Malcolm explained,

> She’s preparing us. She cares about us a lot. She makes sure that we have everything in order so that way she doesn’t allow a bad grade to keep this person off the basketball court or this person off the football field, and they’ll lose out on opportunity from say a college (Malcom Interview #2, 4/16/2019).

Many educators can pit academics against athletics using athletics as leverage for compliance, and yet Mrs. Compass recognized the doors that athletics opened up for many students at Corby, opportunities that students may not have had access to otherwise. In preparing them for the future, she demonstrated a praxis of politicized care by acknowledging her students realities and providing them with the support needed to get to a place where they were empowered to make the most of the opportunities that came their way. At the same time, she worked to convey to her students that their athletic talents could also be an asset they could leverage for future academic success. Malcolm relayed the following advice Mrs. Compass regularly gave the students, "You can always stop playing football, stop playing basketball, stop doing this, but they can never take your education away – that is something that will stick with you forever" (Malcolm Interview #2, 4/16/2019). Mrs. Compass echoed this sentiment when describing her relationship with Anthony & Darius in particular,

> These two really are special for me because I've watched them throw off the insecurity of being smart. For me that's so huge in this school in particular. Because athletes are held up like this (raises her hand high), and I want student-athletes to be like that (raises her other hand higher) (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018).

Mrs. Compass showed her student that she cared and was committed to their relationship by supporting their goals and ensuring they had options for the future. By working with students to help prepare them for their future, Mrs. Compass strengthened her relationship with students because she supported them in reaching their personal goals both within and beyond the classroom.

Practice #5: Engaging students as active participants in their own learning.

"I'm near them and I make sure I am near them." – Mrs. Compass

Many adolescent males can be hesitant to ask for help because they do not want to appear as if there is something they do not know. For Black male adolescents, this fear of asking for help can be compounded by the fact that they believe that if they express a need for help, it may reinforce negative stereotypes about their intellectual ability that they have been working to dismantle. Mrs. Compass recognized that she needed to explicitly teach her students how to ask for help, "That's something that is an intangible that I realize is more important than I thought, about having boys know that they can ask for help" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2019). Mrs. Compass wanted students to feel comfortable asking for help, but also wanted them to feel supported when they did ask for that help. She attempted to make the process of seeking support seem less intimidating for the students by working alongside them both physically and academically.

When initiating a relationship with a new student, Mrs. Compass intentionally put herself in physical proximity to the student, so she was always right at hand should they need help or have a question. She described how she used proximity to lessen any sense of a power dynamic within the room:

> I think the reason the teaching part has been so successful, first of all, is proximity. I'm near them, and I make sure that I'm near them. They're not... I really think even sometimes the physical set up of that classroom, I am not at the head of a classroom, they're not below me; I'm sitting right next to them (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

She intentionally eliminated any physical separation from her students that positioned her as the knower and the students as the ones who needed to absorb her knowledge. During the multiple periods I spent in the academic support room, I never saw Mrs. Compass sit at her desk. On most days the room was so packed that a student actually occupied that space. She moved constantly about the room and when she did help a student, she positioned herself beside him as she looked at the work with him. On one occasion, "She goes over to help a student seated on the opposite side of the table from the previous student she has been helping, and she walks around to the other side of the table to work with him" (Observation #2 Field Notes, 3/8/2019). The tables in the academic support room were skinny, and Mrs. Compass could have easily leaned across the table or had the student pass her his paper but instead she intentionally and strategically moved to positon herself beside the student. On another occasion, she worked side by side with Malcom on his math problem:

> Mrs. Compass goes over to Malcolm and together they look over the math work that is on his computer screen. She is, once again, positioned beside him as she tells him, "Here it says show the model that shows income. You need to stick that in there (she points at the screen). You are actually just doing a plug in or substitution problem, so they want to know the function of time of day so that is your input. Where is the waiting time for outcome – you see that input/output – they are asking you for this PTO is input – time of day – and then it says L is your output- average length of visit. What is the output? You just do input/output – it is called a composite function – so put the 2 in there. What did you get? Then put 12 in there – be careful 2 x 12. Now it says I want to know the cost. Where is your

> cost function? It is not there; it is there; you do not need to simplify. A lot of people are simplifying, but you don't have to you can just literally plug it in. You are going to take that whole thing and plug it in there. Do 4 and then do another parentheses." As Malcolm does the work she has just explained, Mrs. Compass's eyes are focused on his computer screen. She points to things on the screen to ensure that they are on the same page. She continues to walk him through the steps as he goes (Observation #3 Field Notes, 4/16/2019).

In this example, she not only explains the concept but also walks Malcolm through the process as they work on the first problem together. She does not do the work for him, but she guides him through the process to ensure he understands.

In addition to working with her students side by side, Mrs. Compass also ensured students, especially the underclassmen, got the support they needed by never asking students "if they needed help?" She told me, "If I say, 'do you need help? It's always, 'No, I am fine.' So I don't let that happen" (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2019). Instead, she practiced what she has coined "intentional intrusion." She explained, "I just sit down and say, 'Well, I just want to see how you're going to do this one.' Or 'Oh, I love that reading. Can we read it together?" (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2019). She found that students were much less likely to say "no" on these occasions, and she could then start to build a working alliance with the student by positioning herself as someone who was working with them or trying to gain a deeper understanding of what they were doing. On the days I observed academic support, I never heard Mrs. Compass ask a single student if they needed help. Instead I heard her use phrases such as "What are you working on?", "Talk to me about DNA," "Let's look at that," "Walk me through your thinking," "Can

you show me how you got that answer?"(Observation Field Notes 12/14/2018, 3/8/2019, 4/16/2019). She then engaged in the process with the student, giving tips or reminders as needed. In these moments, she became more of a co-learner than someone who had all the answers.

Whenever Mrs. Compass worked alongside a student, she demonstrated that she was much more interested in uncovering their thought processes than in ensuring that the student had the correct answer. Her focus on process helped her ensure the student fully understood the concept and could replicate the process in other contexts. During one observation,

> She walks over to a group of students and asks, "Everybody good here?" She goes over to a student making corrections on an assignment and asks, "Do you understand what you did wrong? This is a tricky one – do you know how to do that?' The student explains it to her, and she moves on" (Observation #3 Field Notes, 4/16/2019).

This example is emblematic of many of the encounters I observed where Mrs. Compass refused to be satisfied with a correct answer; she wanted students to be able to explain their thinking.

As she worked with students, Mrs. Compass modeled what it means to be a lifelong learner and gave students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge as they taught her. During one period, I witnessed her call a student over and consult with him about whether the work she had done with one of his classmates was correct (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/14/18). By admitting when she needed someone else to confirm her work, Mrs. Compass abolished the stigma of asking for help by modeling that everyone

in the room, including her, could learn from one another. Her willingness to learn with students was perhaps best exemplified in a story she recounted about taking a summer school course with her students one year:

> I had taken calculus in high school, but I didn't take trig….So I took trig with the kids in summer school and with the teacher here; it was fabulous. And then we all came up, the whole class and me, came up to academic support, and we did our homework together every day (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

By showing the students that she was willing to admit what she did not know and was also willing to take the risk to try it, Mrs. Compass modeled what it looks like to ask for help, admit what you do not know, and work collaboratively with others to expand your knowledge. In this way, she strengthened her relationships with students by collaboratively working with them to help them accomplish a task or achieve their goals.

Practice # 6: Noticing and naming race-based issues.

"I've had more intimate conversations about my concerns about him in the South."

– Mrs. Compass

Mrs. Compass displayed deep empathy for her Black male students. She wanted to ensure that they were prepared to survive in a world that could at times be hostile towards them. As such she was aware of how their actions may be perceived by those who did not know them and tried to provide her Black male students with advice on how they could ensure they remained safe. She told me that she recognized a legitimate rage in some her Black male students and that she "understands their rage kinesthetically from

my sons" (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018). She talked particularly about how she saw this rage in Anthony and had addressed it with him by telling him:

> There's a rage in you that works in lots of places. It doesn't work in the small zone right here when you come in and somebody either says something to you that you're not sure about. Because this is this kind of tiny small space, and we're just all working to be better students. It works for you in other places. It works for you when you can express that passion (Compass interview #2, 12/10/2018).

She did not attempt to dismiss or extinguish his rage, but she acknowledged that his rage could be beneficial if he channeled it productively.

Additionally, she described how she had had conversations with Malcolm about her concerns for the more blatant racism she felt he might encounter when he went to play football in the South the following year:

> I think with him, I've had more intimate conversations about my concerns about him in the South. I haven't talked to other kids about that, but knowing that-- I've said to him. I've said to him how I feel sometimes about-- and he knows how much I love sports, but I said, "Sometimes I get really so worried that you guys are on the field and all these White people are in the stands cheering for you guys. I wonder are they going to hire you. They're cheering for you every Saturday. They care so much about you supposedly; they're going to be asking you all the time about it. When you're done with football and you go and you apply for a job, are you going to get the same incredible warmth and interest?" We've talked about that and he can handle that talk (Compass Interview #3, 3/15/2019).

As the mother of Black sons, Mrs. Compass worried about how her sons would be treated by others, and she transferred this same worry and concern to her Black male students. She recognized the world is often unkind to Black male adolescents and was not shy about engaging students in discussion about those issues. As a result, Mrs. Compass demonstrated politicized care for her students by acknowledging that race does influence their daily lives and established herself as an ally for her Black male students, which strengthened her bond with them.

Mrs. Compass has successfully initiated and maintained productive relationship with many Black male students at Corby over the past ten years because she interacted with her students in a humanizing manner, was a consistent positive presence in their school lives, prioritized their growth, prepared them for short and long term success, engaged them as participants in their own learning, and willing noticed and named race based issues. While Mrs. Compass has been able to enact each of these practices successfully, the way in which she has enacted them has been in some cases heavily influenced by certain dimensions of her personal identity. In the next section, I address my second research question: *How does a teacher's identity – particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role – influence the ways they initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students?* I specifically examine the dimensions of Mrs. Compass's identity that have had the most profound influence on her relational practices described above.

Influence of dimensions of identity on relational practices.

While the practices described above capture the essence of how Mrs. Compass initiated and maintained positive relationships with her Black male students, the way she

approached these practices was also influenced by dimensions of her identity including her race, gender, life experiences, and institutional role as the co-director of academic support.

Race. While Mrs. Compass's Whiteness did not impede her from forming relationship with her Black male students, it did at times influence the trajectory of those relationships. Mrs. Compass acknowledged that her Whiteness and the fact that she did not outwardly appear to be someone with whom Black male students could connect, made it so, "They (the students) don't see me as somebody that they can ask for help right away" (Compass interview #3, 3/15/2019). She recognized that many of her Black male students had had negative experiences with White teachers both at Corby and at their previous schools. She explained, "I think a lot of our African-American kids feel that there are lots of White teachers here that are still racially biased" (Compass interview #3, 3/15/2019). Thus, Mrs. Compass at times had to contend with the fact that students might initially be less inclined to engage in a meaningful relationship with her because they had preconceived notions of her based on her race. For example, Mrs. Compass reflected, "When Trump was elected, there was palpable division in this school…there'll be kids that assumed-- not kids that know me, but kids that assumed that I probably voted for Trump" (Compass Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Mrs. Compass, however, acknowledged the legitimacy of students' feelings and understood that they were often informed by prior negative experiences with White authority figures, so she did not take their assumptions about her personally. Instead, she gave her Black male students the time they needed to get to know her and to feel comfortable with her. She also made a genuine effort to

demonstrate her investment in them by attending their extracurricular events and consistently approaching them from a place of positivity.

Through her patience, commitment, and unwavering positivity, she was in most cases able eventually, to break down the initial barriers her Whiteness may present in initiating relationships with her Black male students. Darius recounted that the first time he came to academic support, Mrs. Compass kicked him out for eating in the classroom. So, he said in regards to their relationship, "Initially it didn't go too well. But over time, like we started to warm up to each other and everything started going really well." He attributed this, in part, to the fact that "she treats everyone the same. There's no bias in her. There's not one shred as much as I've seen of hatred in her, evil – she is one hundred percent good" (Darius interview #1, 1/24/2019). Darius's reflection demonstrates how Mrs. Compass's care for him over time became more important to him than her race because he felt she did not treat him differently because he was Black.

Finally, while Mrs. Compass was very empathetic and open to discussing race and oppression with her students, it seemed that she was often the one to engage students in conversations about race. In some instances, it appeared that given her identity as a White woman, she needed to demonstrate her vulnerability and communicate to students that she was open to having critical discussions about race and to hearing her Black male students perspectives before students would engage in these discussion with her. Also in recognition of her own position as a White woman, she was more likely to engage in in-depth conversation about race with students with whom she had already had an established trust and rapport.

Gender. Overall, Mrs. Compass's gender did not seem to have a significant impact on her relational practice. If anything, Mrs. Compass's gender as well as her age, caused students to often view her as a nurturing maternal figure. Mrs. Compass's relationship with her students often closely reflected the relationship they might have with their mother or another supportive female member of their family. Anthony used the word "aunt" to describe her, and Darius used the word "grandmother" although he was quick to correct that this description was due more to demeanor than age. Mrs. Compass herself acknowledged the more parental role she took on for many of her students,

> I'm not, because of my age, I'm not someone who ever seems like their friend. I may seem like a parent, but they know how much I care about them, because of my accessibility and my availability (Compass interview #1, 10/9/2018).

In an interview she did for the school's fundraising campaign, she explained that for the boys at Corby the female teachers add an element of motherhood to the Corby "brotherhood" that is an important aspect of the students' experience and sense of belonging at the school (Corby High School website). Her gender, allowed her male students to be, at times, more vulnerable with her than they might have been with a male teacher or coach, and thus they were more willing to ask for help.

While her race and gender impacted the way Mrs. Compass related to her Black male students, these visible dimensions of her identity did not impede her ability to form productive relationship with her Black male students. In fact, these internal factors appeared to be less important than the external and organizational dimensions of her identity that helped facilitate the relationship building process.

Life experience. Mrs. Compass was able to develop productive relationships with her Black male students because she consistently was able to provide them with the academic support they needed to be successful in their classes regardless of the subject matter. Mrs. Compass attributed her strong content knowledge and academic self-efficacy to both her own education, particularly her liberal arts degree as well as her role as a mother and the experiences she had had providing academic support for her sons and their friends (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

Her life experiences, however, influenced much more than her ability to provide the academic support her students needed. They also helped her develop a deep empathy for all her students, particularly for her Black male students. Throughout her life, she has witnessed the plight of Black males she has loved as they encountered racism – her brother, her sons, her students. She told me, “I've watched day by day, year by year, incredible racial discrimination” (Compass Interview #1, 12/14/2019), and while she recognized that bearing witness to this discrimination is not the same as experiencing it first hand, it has given her insight into the bias and stereotypes her Black male students must contend with on a regular basis.

She relayed two stories about one of her sons that highlight for her the stereotypical assumptions Black male youth confront in their daily lives at all ages and all levels of education. First, she recounted,

> [My son] got misidentified in kindergarten at recess, because he looked like another Black boy, 'cause they all look the same, right? He had to sit against the wall at recess because some other kid kicked someone else. And, at five, he was enraged.

She then told me how the same son played soccer in college and one day was walking back from practice with his teammates, when "the police stopped them and took the two African-Americans, sat them on the curb in front of a huge freshman dorm because there had been a robbery in the neighborhood, and it had just been identified as Black kids" (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2019). While Mrs. Compass did not experience these events first hand, as a mother she experienced the pain and the rage that her son felt in these moments, which has led her to be able to adopt of politicized care for her students that leads her to recognize, acknowledge, and validate that same pain and rage in them.

I also think it is important to qualify that while Mrs. Compass has gained a greater understanding of her Black male students' political, social, and economic realities in America given her close relationship with her brother and her sons, she does not leverage her role as the sister and mother of Black men to garner favor with her Black male students. She told me that on occasion when one of her sons will stop by school, most of the students are shocked because "Most of them don't know about my family" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018). When I asked her if she ever felt she had to overcome her Whiteness when building a relationship with her Black male students, she told me, "Absolutely. It probably would have made some sense if I had maybe even-- but I wanted to keep my family completely out of it" (Compass Interview #3, 3/15/2019). She told me that she instead tried to initiate a relationship through a student's interests and getting to know them as a person. She has made an important and intentional choice not to tokenize her sons or to diminish her students by using her sons' race to validate her as someone worthy of her Black male students' trust.

Institutional role. Finally, Mrs. Compass's ability to connect with students was strongly influenced by her role in the school as the co-director of academic support. Given her position and the nature of academic support at Corby High School, all students chose to attend academic support and therefore entered into the relationship with Mrs. Compass voluntarily. The students' ability to opt into academic support was one of the components that allowed Mrs. Compass to establish such a strong and supportive relationship with her students. She explained,

> We're very countercultural, in that we're not like a lot of private schools that have an academic support more for their IEP kids. We are very, very opposed to that. It's completely voluntary. So I have kids in there who are going to the Naval Academy sitting next to kids in there who are going to community college next year. And it's the beauty of it, because they don't feel the stigma, they don't feel like they're going because they have a learning challenge or they're on an IEP (Compass Interview #1, 10/9/2018).

Not only did the voluntary nature of academic support remove the stigma attached to those with learning differences, but it also provides those who were performing at an average level but wanted to excel a space to access support. In addition, Mrs. Compass noted that as result of the voluntarily nature of academic support, "I never have a behavior problem, because everybody that's there doesn't have to be there, they want to be there" (Compass Interview #2, 12/10/2018).

Due to her role, Mrs. Compass also did not have to issue grades to students, which made it possible for her to act as a constant cheerleader for her students. When I asked

her about how she handled tension in her relationships with students, she told me that it was very uncommon for her to experience tension with students:

> Part of it is because I have the luxury of not handing out grades. That is an incredible luxury that I know, because I'm sure if he had been late with an assignment, and only gotten 50% of the 100%, I'm sure I could've seen that little anger. With me, he comes in knowing that he's going to get help, and knowing that he's going to get that kind of unconditional help. It's not going to be based on the fact that you screwed up last week (Compass interview #2, 12/10/2018).

Grades can often feel to students like they are arbitrary or that they are a final judgement on a student's ability and to some extent their worth. Mrs. Compass's ability to connect with students and focus on growth was in part due to the fact that she never had to issue a decree on where a student stood in terms of their learning.

Overall, Mrs. Compass's age, gender, and race all impacted the way that she interacted with students especially during the initial phase of the relationship, but her life experience, especially her experiences of kinship with Black family members and her role within the school, which made her relationship with students voluntary and entirely support-focused seemed to have a stronger impact on her long-term ability to maintain productive relationships with students over time.

Mr. Fitzgerald

"*He wanted to hear our voice because Mr. Fitzgerald, that's the thing, he knows we all have a voice, even though some kids are shy. He makes sure we say our opinion because every opinion counts. Every thought matters."* – Roger

Participant profile.

I arrived to Mr. Fitzgerald's classroom one morning in mid-December. The room itself is small, and 25 desks fit compactly into the room in five rows of five. The back wall is covered with floor to ceiling bookshelves, most of which are filled with a wide variety of books. There is little blank space in the room; the walls hold an eclectic mix of posters that seems to represent not only the course content but Mr. Fitzgerald himself - Bob Dylan, Frederick Douglass, a U.S. Map, Lord of the Rings, the Harlem Renaissance. Batman lurks about the room in several hand drawn renderings. Over the door is a drawing of Pallas Athena with Poe's raven atop her head. At the bottom of one bulletin board hangs four posters in a row that read "9th grade students aspire to be….", the next "10th grade students aspire to be," then 11th, and 12th, putting the school's vision on clear display for the students. They are accompanied by a poster of the school's baseball team and the local professional football team's pennant. Other posters contain quotes: "Born to Read, Forced to Work," "Not All Who Wander are Lost," and "I Cannot Live without Books."

In addition to the more professionally made inspirational posters, some home-made ones have been typed out and stuck to the wall – the one atop the white board reads, "The skill I was learning was a crucial one, the patience to read things I could not yet understand," – Tara Westover (an excerpt from her memoir Educated). There is another over the door that reads, "I came in the spirit of the autodidactic, of auto liberation, of writing, of Douglass and Malcolm X. I came in ignorance, and found I was

more ignorant than I knew. Even there, I was much more comfortable in the library, thumbing through random histories, than I was in the classroom. It was enough. It will not be enough. Sometimes you do need the master's tools to dismantle his house." – Ta-Nehisi Coates. At the back of the room among the bookshelves are several other posters – one contains a picture of Thomas Jefferson with the quote, "I'm a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work the more I have of it." Below this quote on a blue cardstock sign it reads – "If Thomas Jefferson's genius matters so does his taking of Sally Heming's body. If George Washington's crossing of the Delaware matters so must his ruthless pursuit of the runagate Oney Judge," - Coates (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018).

In the front of the room, leaning on a podium is Mr. Fitzgerald. He is a tall thin White man in his mid-thirties with brown hair, a beard and glasses. His appearance calls to mind a typical caricature of an English professor. He is a self-admitted lover of reading and writing, and our interviews frequently veer off course as we talk about books - sharing our favorite ones we've read, our favorite ones we've been able to teach. It is clear from my first conversation with him that he is deeply pensive and derives energy from teaching not only because of the students but also because of his innate love of learning. Mr. Fitzgerald is himself a graduate of Corby High School and returned to join the faculty shortly after he graduated from college. He is now in his thirteenth year at the school and has this year been awarded the school's title as "Veteran Teacher of the Year."

Mr. Fitzgerald teaches primarily sophomore American Literature classes, but he also teaches electives in creative writing and a senior seminar on the work of Tolkien. For

this study, I observed Mr. Fitzgerald in and interviewed students from one of his sophomore American literature classes. The class I observed was designated as a lower level college prep class and while the overall population of Corby High School is diverse, all but one of the students in this particular class were students of color, the majority of whom were Black.

Through my conversations with Mr. Fitzgerald and his students as well as through my classroom observations, I identified five practices he regularly used to initiate and maintain relationship with his Black male students. In this section, I describe these five relational practices: 1) interacting with students in a humanizing manner; 2) providing opportunities for redemption; 3) engaging students as active participants in their own learning; 4) preparing students for short and long-term success; and 5) creating a space for conversations about race.

Practice #1: Interacting with students in a humanizing manner.

"They just want to feel seen" – Mr. Fitzgerald

One of the essential ways Mr. Fitzgerald established relationships with his Black male students was by making sure they felt seen in his classroom. He paid close attention to his students and got to know them as individuals. In learning about his students, he was better able to identify and nurture their individual talents and potential. One of the foundational steps he took to initiate a relationship with students was simply acknowledging them when he saw them whether that was by saying hello when he passed them in the hallway or by greeting them as they walked into the classroom. He explained,

> I think kids in general want to be paid attention to. It's amazing to me how many of the comments on the senior exit interview include 'Mr. Fitzgerald said 'hi' to

> me in the hall.' You know, it's like they just want to feel seen. It's such a small thing, but I think it does matter a lot to them (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

These small acts of recognition are an important component of politicized care and not only happened in the hallway but also in the classroom. For example, during one observation, I noted: "Calvin does not have his book; Mr. Fitzgerald notices and pulls an extra book off the shelf and unobtrusively hands it to him" (Observation #2 Field Notes, 3/15/2019). By noticing that Calvin didn't have the materials he needed to participate in the class and by providing him with those materials, Mr. Fitzgerald demonstrated that Calvin's learning was important to him. Additionally, because he handled the issue discreetly rather than making a big deal out of Calvin not having the book, Mr. Fitzgerald encouraged Calvin to become a more active participant in the lesson and the learning community.

In addition to taking time to notice and acknowledge his students, Mr. Fitzgerald also carved out space for short casual interactions with students. When reflecting on his budding relationship with Calvin, Mr. Fitzgerald described:

> He stays after class and chit chats a little bit about what just happened in class or something else. There are students who like to touch base with the teacher; he's definitely one of those students who likes to touch base with the teacher, or with me at least (Fitzgerald interview #2, 12/5/2018).

Mr. Fitzgerald noted how these small seemingly insignificant moments with students could create a foundation from which a relationship could grow: "I can't think of anything else specific just a quick remark here or there or a quick joke here or there, none of it memorable, but together something substantial is formed" (Fitzgerald Interview #2,

12/6/2018). For Mr. Fitzgerald, this consistent acknowledgement and small individual interactions with students rather than grand gestures helped him to build and maintain a relationship with his students over time.

These small moments were particularly important for Mr. Fitzgerald because he had limited time outside of the school day to connect with students or to facilitate extracurricular activities as he was busy raising his own small children. Because of his at times limited availability outside of class, he intentionally created opportunities within his class structure to get to know his students on a more personal level. When he did have extra time, he ensured that he used that time to make meaningful connections with students by spending the time on things that were beneficial for them. For instance, he often made himself available during lunch or planning periods to work one-on-one with current and former students. On the day his students worked on their personal narrative in class, Mr. Fitzgerald told them that if they needed extra help, "You are welcome to come in here during interim tomorrow or Thursday or afterschool on Thursday" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018). On another day after he had handed a test back to the students, he told them, "If you want to sit down with me one-on-one to review your essay, I am glad to do so" (Observation #2 Field Notes, 3/15/2019). Additionally, he informed me that many of his former students would as seniors seek him out during these times for assistance on their college essays.

In addition to these small moments of acknowledgement and the time he provided for students who wanted or needed extra help, Mr. Fitzgerald also got to know his students through the curriculum. For Mr. Fitzgerald, the curriculum, the content, and his presentation of it were all an expression of who he is. It was the way that he shared

himself with his students, and the way he invited his students to show him who they are. Because Mr. Fitzgerald worked in a parochial school, he had a great deal of freedom over his curriculum design, and he was very deliberate about the assignments he chose and the texts he selected as well as the order in which he presented these materials in class. He constructed them all in service of building relationships with students and creating a coherent classroom community.

The very first writing project he typically assigned his sophomores was a reading history letter which "gets them to tell a little bit of the story of themselves….as a starting point for conversations and getting to know them a little bit better" (Fitzgerald interview #2, 12/6/2018). In addition to the reading history letter, he also had students write personal narratives. He claimed that over the years he had found that in their personal narrative students were "very vulnerable, and they'll let you in" (Fitzgerald interview #2, 12/6/2018). These two assignments helped Mr. Fitzgerald to learn about students and sent his students a message that their personal story and knowledge had value within his classroom. For example, the personal narrative assignment provided Roger an opportunity to recount a discriminatory encounter he had with his principal at his middle school. In the personal narrative, Roger described the conversation his White principal had with him after he had been in a fight,

> He asked in a mocking tone, "Do you think they have your back?" I didn't know where this was going so I just replied "yeah." He laughed. I was trying to figure out what or why was he laughing. When he finished laughing, he asked still mocking, "Because they are your N----s right?" I had to process this; the dude just said the N word. No like he really said it" (Roger Personal Narrative).

Through this assignment, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to gain an important perspective on Roger and his prior school experiences that may inform some of his interactions with Mr. Fitzgerald.

In addition to his carefully selected writing assignments, Mr. Fitzgerald also included an independent reading program as a core component of his curriculum. Each day, students spent the first several minutes of class reading a book for pleasure, which provided Mr. Fitzgerald an opportunity to connect with his students through the books they chose to read:

> You learning something about a kid by the book he picks. And, if you've also read the book and you're able to have a side conversation with him about it, he feels like...I am being seen by the teacher, he knows something about me. I think moments like that are important (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

By learning about his students' interests through the books they read, Mr. Fitzgerald then had a gateway to engage with them on a more personal level either to discuss a common interest or to allow the students to share their knowledge of the subject with him. During one of my classroom observations, I witnessed how the independent reading program created small opportunities for one-on-one interactions with individual students: "A student stands at the back of the classroom perusing the book shelf. Mr. Fitzgerald stops to check in with him to see if he needs help selecting his next independent reading book" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018). In this situation, Mr. Fitzgerald communicated to this student that he noticed him by giving the student a small moment of individualized attention. Roger described how much he enjoyed these types of interactions with Mr. Fitzgerald as they worked together to select a book:

> Mr. Fitzgerald, you tell him kind of what you are interested in, and it is like off the bat he names five books…he helps you…he asks, "What do you like? What are you interested in?" If you say action, he says, "What kind of action? I got you" (Roger Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

In this instance, Roger expressed how much he appreciated Mr. Fitzgerald's vast knowledge of books and his willingness to get to know what the students were interested in, so he could find them a book that was a good match for them.

Mr. Fitzgerald also validated his students by ensuring he gave them opportunities to voice their thoughts and opinions in class. He told me, "I like to hear every kid's voice every class" (Fitzgerald interview #2, 12/6/2018). He wanted students to feel empowered to make observations, to express their true opinions, and to share their experiences without judgement. The students recognized and appreciated Mr. Fitzgerald's efforts to incorporate their voice into the class as Roger explained:

> He wants to hear our voice because Mr. Fitzgerald, that's the thing, he knows we all have a voice, even though some kids are shy. He makes sure we say our opinion because every opinion counts, every thought matters (Roger interview #1, 2/15/2019).

During one class I observed, the students discussed whether the main character in *Mexican White Boy*, Danny, would end up like his father. Mr. Fitzgerald structured a spontaneous debate in the classroom in order to elicit multiple students' thoughts and opinions on the topic:

> Mr. Fitzgerald says, "Let's entertain Roger's question. Is there a chance Danny could become like his father?"

Students begin to voice differing opinions.

Mr. Fitzgerald suggests, “Let’s do a vote. Give me a show of hands who thinks Danny may end up like his father? Who thinks no way?”

About half of the class raises their hands for each option, so Mr. Fitzgerald pushes them to explain their answers.

One student states, “I feel like since he wants to be with his dad so much, he will follow everything he does – if he sees him do these things – he will do it.”

“I disagree,” chimes in another student, “you can’t change who you are.”

Mr. Fitzgerald interrupts for a second, “One of our central questions – this is going to be an organizing theme – can you change who you are?”

“I agree with the first student because anything is possible – I think he is so – he went to National City to see his father – he would do whatever his dad would do – kill someone – whatever,” argues a third student.

“No, no – he is too shy,” chimes in a fourth student.

“Well, maybe not kill,” clarifies the student, “but maybe one step less.”

“He is lost, so he would do anything he could – he could be like his dad but not exactly the same – he wants to follow in his dad’s footsteps and see where it takes him,” adds a fifth student.

“To add on to what I was saying,” says one of the students, “he is with his family who is telling him you are so smart – he is saying, ‘no I am not that smart’ – he is trying to get away from the character he is” (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018).

In this episode, Mr. Fitzgerald was receptive to the questions students found relevant and then made space for students to discuss those questions and express their opinions. His approach in this moment demonstrated that Mr. Fitzgerald recognized his students as scholars and validated their worth as people, which was not always his students' experience in other classes. Roger told me, "I feel like he does make every voice count. That is unique to his class" (Roger interview #2, 4/10/2019).

When I explicitly asked Calvin how he felt about being in a class where the majority of the students were students of color and the teacher is White, he told me that it made no difference because "we are always free to speak willingly…We've never been afraid to say what is on our minds" (Calvin interview #1, 1/24/2019). Similarly when I asked Roger if he thought there was anything teachers in general needed to do to specifically support their Black male students, he told me, "Hearing their voices because everybody's opinion and voice matter and there's a story. For everyone there's a story in each person's history…just hearing, listening, and talking to them" (Roger Interview #2, 4/10/2019). Thus, Mr. Fitzgerald's continual solicitation of his students' opinions demonstrated his politicized care for his students because by taking a vulnerable stance in the classroom where he was willing to listen and learn from his students, he communicated to his students that both they and their experiences mattered.

For Mr. Fitzgerald the ultimate goal of getting to know a student was so he could use that knowledge to engage the student both in a relationship and in the curriculum. He described how Calvin demonstrated his profound gifts as an orator during an in class debate, "He kind of showed himself in that moment…and I was like, 'I can work with this'" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). Mr. Fitzgerald felt that he could better

support Calvin now that he had recognized him in a moment of success. He told me, "There've been years that we have done debates and there are years that we haven't done debates, but because Calvin is in the class, we are absolutely doing debates" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). Thus, Mr. Fitzgerald used his knowledge of Calvin to adjust his curriculum in a way that allowed him to highlight this particular student's individual talents. He explained,

> It's my job, I think, to push some students out of their comfort zones, and it's also my job just to find others, like Calvin, an opportunity, a platform, so that they can play around with these ideas and really feel some personal investment in the class (Fitzgerald interview #2, 12/6/2018).

By getting to know students on an individual level through small interactions and the course content, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to make the individual adjustments needed to build upon students' strengths in a way that engaged them in the class and motivated them to put forth their best effort. Calvin described what he appreciated about Mr. Fitzgerald's class stating,

> When we do debates, those are especially awesome. Especially because I'll come in and type my remarks even though it's not required, but then it's just an automatic shutdown when I come up to the podium. I'll even get the props ready (Calvin interview #1, 1/24/2019).

Because Mr. Fitzgerald included an assignment in his curriculum that he knew would motivate Calvin, Calvin went above and beyond in the effort and preparation he put into the assignment.

Through his careful observation of his students, Mr. Fitzgerald recognized the many assets students brought with them to the classroom and focused on using those skills to promote success rather than fixating on the skills students may lack. In contrasting Calvin's typical class performance to his performance in the debate, Mr. Fitzgerald told me, "I would say his overall performance is average, but his engagement in those debate moments is so successful that I feel like he is being a successful student" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). The focal students recognized and appreciated that Mr. Fitzgerald acknowledged their talents and supported them in reaching their potential. Roger told me,

> He knows we all have potential and now we just need to use it. We just need that push like a bird, like the baby bird needs the push to fly. He would say something about how we're all unique and gifted, we just need a push sometimes (Roger interview #1, 2/15/2019).

When I shared Roger's statement with Mr. Fitzgerald, he clarified that he's never used the term "unique and gifted" in class. However, he was glad Roger felt that way even if the actual exchange never happened. He then went on to echo a sentiment similar to one he had shared with me in one of our first interviews, "For most students in a remedial section, school has always been something that they aren't good at. No one likes attempting tasks that regularly provide the feedback, 'You aren't cutting it.' That's why, as the teacher, you've got to find ways to play to their strengths, to validate their efforts in a sincere way" (personal email, 12/29/2019). Mr. Fitzgerald's praxis of politicized care and asset-based approach, which prioritized his students, their humanity, and their

potential, helped him initiate and maintain productive relationship with his Black male students because he made sure they felt seen and heard in his classroom.

Practice #2: Providing opportunities for redemption.

"Help people, don't hurt them."

When I asked Mr. Fitzgerald to describe his philosophy of teaching, he told me that a long time teacher at Corby was asked to share his life advice with the staff, and he answered with the simple adage "help people, don't hurt them." Mr. Fitzgerald described this as the adage that best summed up his approach to relationships with his students (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018). He acknowledged that on many occasion, "You feel more to them [students] like an opponent or more like a referee than somebody who's on their side" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). Given this understanding, Mr. Fitzgerald was very thoughtful about his interactions with students especially during times of tension or heightened emotion. While Mr. Fitzgerald took this approach with all his students, it is perhaps more important for Black students who are frequently judged more harshly than their White peers particularly by White teachers. Roger described how his views on discrimination change after an incident with a White teacher at his middle school,

> Before that, I would think that I'd be treated the same as any other person Caucasian, Black, Hispanic. I would think that if somebody had done the same thing, but they were a different race, they would get suspended for probably five or ten days, so would I…but ever since then, I feel different…It takes me a while to trust people because I don't know if they can be harmful to me or helpful to me (Roger interview #2, 4/10/2019).

Thus, for students like Roger, who have had negative interactions with White teachers in the past, Mr. Fitzgerald's approach was essential in communicating to them that he was there to help them rather than harm them.

For Mr. Fitzgerald, the primary way he tried to help students was to offer them opportunities for redemption both academically and behaviorally. He did not want his students to think that a grade was ever irreparable or that they couldn't recover from a poor decision. Academically rather than offer extra credit, Mr. Fitzgerald offered what he termed "redemption points." He told me "redemption points are huge" because "so many of them [students] will not do what they're supposed to do the first time through, but once they're in a hole and they hear, like, you know, 'extra credit' or think, 'I can earn my way back' they are game for things" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018). Thus, Mr. Fitzgerald allowed students to improve upon their initial performance while at the same time fore fronting the best interest of the students by maintaining his high expectations that they master the content, so they would be more successful on the next task. I witnessed the redemption points in action during one of my classroom observations when Mr. Fitzgerald returned a test and told the students, "Let's take a look at the test. I am going to give you an opportunity to re-do some of these points by Friday. For each one you got wrong, write out the correct answer in a complete sentence. I will give you a half a point for each one you correct" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018). By providing the opportunity for academic redemption points, Mr. Fitzgerald prioritized student growth and the importance of learning from mistakes. Additionally, it allowed him to ease some of the tension that can arise in student-teacher relationships over grades and helped him to maintain a productive relationship with students even when they

received low scores because he placed an emphasis on improvement, which returned agency to the student.

Mr. Fitzgerald believed redemption was important not only in terms of academics but also in terms of classroom behavior. He explained that he tried to handle most behavior incidents that occurred in his classroom one-on-one with the student rather than outsourcing the issue to a dean because from his perspective, "If there's an opportunity for correction and the kids take advantage of that opportunity, then they can solve it" (Fitzgerald Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Furthermore, he believed it was important to model gentleness and to provide students "a way out as opposed to just bringing down the hammer" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). Mr. Fitzgerald recognized that when students felt trapped or threatened, behavioral situation usually escalated and his goal was to de-escalate situation so that students could learn. As such, he approached his correction of students "through the lens of concern" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). He described that when having a one-on-one conversation with a student concerning behaviors he purposefully used probing questions, "Are you okay? You don't seem to be yourself. Is something going on?" and also confirmed with the student that the way he interpreted the behavior was in line with the students' intention by using statements like, "My perception of your behavior is…is that what you intended?" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). In this way, Mr. Fitzgerald signaled to students that he wanted to understand their behavior rather than that he wanted to control or punish them. Furthermore, his approach demonstrated his understanding that his perception of the behavior may lie more in his own assumptions of what is appropriate than in the actual intentions of the students.

By handling disciplinary incidents from this more inquiry-based perspective, Mr. Fitzgerald demonstrated a praxis of politicized care where he prioritized open communication with students and intentionally took a listening and learning stance recognizing that he may not always fully understand his students' intentions. This approached helped him to maintain productive relationships with students by demonstrating his respect for them, and might be particularly important for Black male students for whom removal from class and referral to the administration can have more negative outcomes. Roger explained the positive impact this type of interaction with Mr. Fitzgerald had on him as a student, as well as how Mr. Fitzgerald's approach differed from his encounters with other teachers:

> One day I was having a bad day, and I was not in it, and Mr. Fitzgerald just pulled me aside and asked, "What's wrong?" And I talked to him, and he said, "Okay," and he listened, and it made me feel better because I had someone to talk to, and I went back to class. That was probably the best part, because at this school there are not really many people to talk to especially because of the fact that it's a private school. You're scared that if you say something or talk about something that you're either going to get judged or suspended or something like that. He [Mr. Fitzgerald] understands, and he just says, it's okay and just try and focus in his class, but he doesn't force us like, you know, like, okay, whatever. "You have to do this, and if you don't do it I'm giving you a Saturday [detention]." No, he's like, "It's ok, but try your best. If you can't do it, just turn it in tomorrow or make sure you have it done as homework" (Roger Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

Mr. Fitzgerald also offered me his perspective on the situation Roger described:

> That situation with Roger was starting to escalate, and I could tell it was starting to escalate. I was starting to lose my temper, and I didn't want to. I said, "We need to have a talk outside," which is very rare….but those conversation need to happen outside. It's out of everybody's earshot; nobody knows what's happening. And afterwards he came back in the room and completely turned it around. Then I told him after class, "I appreciate that you turned it around." I let him know things were good (Fitzgerald Interview #3, 3/15/2019).

In this situation, both parties saw the conversation that happened outside the room as ultimately having a positive outcome. Despite feeling frustrated, Mr. Fitzgerald still addressed the issue in a calm manner through the lens of concern. As a result, Roger only commented on Mr. Fitzgerald's concern, willingness to listen, and understanding not his anger or frustration. Because of Mr. Fitzgerald's concerned response, Roger felt validated and turned the situation around. In this case Mr. Fitzgerald lived his adage of "helping not hurting" by proactively working to de-escalate the situation rather than making the situation worse by provoking or threatening Roger. Mr. Fitzgerald accomplished this result by leading with questions and concern rather than an expression of his own anger and frustration. In this situation, Mr. Fitzgerald not only helped Roger in the way he responded, but he also helped him by making the correction private. He recognized, "if they [students] have an audience, they have to perform for that, they don't want to be humiliated in front of them, it's a much different kid" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). Thus, Mr. Fitzgerald gave Roger an opportunity to rectify the situation with Mr. Fitzgerald while at the same time saving face with his peers. In this way, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to maintain a strong relationship with Roger because Roger

recognized that Mr. Fitzgerald's response was reasonable, and when Roger positively responded to this conversation with Mr. Fitzgerald, Mr. Fitzgerald re-set the relationship, let the incident go, and continued to interact positively with Roger throughout the rest of class.

Mr. Fitzgerald persisted through his tension with students by "separating the behaviors, the decisions from the kid" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018). He never wanted a student to feel that one decision had permanently labeled that student or for the students to feel that one incident had altered Mr. Fitzgerald's overall opinion of them. He expanded, "They don't want to be labeled in a certain way…They want to get someone to help" (Fitzgerald Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Through his actions, Mr. Fitzgerald communicated to students that he would help them and that he would seek out the best in them regardless of how they acted on their worst days. Therefore he was able to continually renew his relationship with his Black male students because he never delivered a final judgement about them.

Practice #3: Engaging students as active participants in their own learning.

"You're never bored." - Calvin

Both Calvin and Roger described Mr. Fitzgerald's class as engaging and informative. Roger told me, "It's not a class you sleep in" (Roger Interview #1, 2/15/2019). Similarly, Calvin stated,

> You're never bored. You're always doing something whether it's fun, or whether it's needed for you. But no matter what you are doing in his class, you always come out learning a whole lot more than what you came in knowing" (Calvin Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

Both focal students juxtaposed their experience of engagement in Mr. Fitzgerald's class with what occurred in some of their other classes where they felt less involved and engaged or where they felt the teachers just talked at them the whole class. Mr. Fitzgerald pulled his students into the class by engaging them as active participants in their own learning. Even on something as mundane as a quiz review he drew his students in "as he rapidly goes from question to question calling on each student by name and engaging multiple students in the recap of what they had previously read" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/18). On another occasion, he split the class into teams and had them race against one another to sequence events from *The Great Gatsby* in the order that they occurred rather than in the order they were presented in the text (Observation #3 Field Nots, 4/30/2019).

When describing his philosophy of teaching, Mr. Fitzgerald referenced Leonard Sax's book, *Boys Adrift*, and mentioned that one of his major take-aways from the book was the concept of working with students "shoulder to shoulder," so together you are accomplishing the work. Mr. Fitzgerald acknowledged that for him one of the things that most attracted him to teaching was his profound love of learning:

> I think that I'm at my most successful when I'm able to model that love of learning for my students, so that they see the learning process – they see the piece being written not only the final product. You are not so distant from them. You're not this other type of thing in the classroom (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2019).

Thus, Mr. Fitzgerald attempted to model his own love of learning by entering into the learning process with his students. Each time I entered Mr. Fitzgerald's classroom for an observation, I witnessed both he and his students immersed in their independent reading

books. As I noted during my first observation on December 18th, "For the first several minutes of class – all students sit reading a novel of their choice – Mr. Fitzgerald sits at the front of the room and reads his own book alongside them" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018); again on March 15th, "I walk into the classroom a few minutes after the bell, the room is quiet- everyone in the room including Mr. Fitzgerald is engaged in independent reading" (Observation #2, Field Notes, 3/15/2019). And once more on April 20th, "When I walk in, the room is silent as students complete their independent reading. Every student has a book in front of them – most appear to be engaged in it. Mr. Fitzgerald sits at the front of the class at a podium and reads his own book along with the students" (Observation #3 Field Notes, 4/30/2019). I not only witnessed this "shoulder to shoulder" phenomenon when students were doing their independent reading but also as they worked on their personal narratives. Mr. Fitzgerald sat in the back of the room at a student desk and invited students to sit beside him and go through their writing:

> A student raises his hand. "Great come to the back," says Mr. Fitzgerald.
>
> Mr. Fitzgerald takes an empty desk at the back of the room. The student goes to the back of the room to consult with Mr. Fitzgerald while the rest of the students log onto their papers in Google Docs. "I didn't know what you meant by suspense," the student states in response to written feedback he has received on his paper. "The sense that something was about to happen in the story," Mr. Fitzgerald explains. Then he gives an example of how the student might be able to create suspense in his narrative, "See here how you slowed things down – even though you are in the same scene – use more than one paragraph there – you do a good job there getting some perspective - sound good?" The student nods and

> goes back to his desk to continue working (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018).

Through this consultation like model, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to find small opportunities to provide support to individual students. He explained,

> If I can get you a few moments in the classroom during those 55 minutes in which the students sense we're on the same side looking at this thing together, moving in this direction that is beneficial to them - that's usually what I think is most positive (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

By working alongside students, Mr. Fitzgerald allowed students to take ownership over and be active participants in their own learning.

On another occasions Mr. Fitzgerald engaged Calvin as an active participant in his own learning by responding to his desire to discuss a current event in class. Calvin described how one day he went home after school and did research on a current event they had briefly discussed in class but that he wanted to know more about. During his research, he came across additional information that he thought would make for a meaningful class discussion, so he emailed Mr. Fitzgerald to ask if they could have time to discuss the issue in class, and in response to Calvin's request, Mr. Fitzgerald made room for the discussion in class the next day (Calvin Interview #1, 1/24/2019). Calvin also described how he enjoyed consulting with Mr. Fitzgerald when he prepared his remarks for an in-class debate. He explained, "Sometimes I would have Mr. Fitzgerald proofread those final arguments for the debates and say, 'What would you change about this? What could I do to make this better?'" (Calvin, Interview #2, 4/20/2019). While these may not be every day activities, Calvin found that in each class, Mr. Fitzgerald

"wants to see your opinions on ideas that you pull out of the story. You're not just idle – it's not just a boring lecture, you're actively participating in it for the full hour" (Calvin Interview #1, 1/24/2019). During class, Calvin was invested in the learning process because he felt Mr. Fitzgerald was helping him to achieve his personal learning goals and satiate his intellectual curiosity. Similarly, Roger described,

> He's a good teacher and he makes it light for me. I can't sit down long because I get antsy, ADHD. That's why I was struggling in middle school, but he makes sure that even for kids who have ADHD, who can't sit down long, there's still something that keeps you connected (Roger Interview #2, 4/10/2019).

Both Calvin and Roger were attentive in Mr. Fitzgerald's class because he made the lessons engaging and relevant.

Since Mr. Fitzgerald taught in a parochial school, he had the liberty to plan and choose his own curriculum. He told me, "I need to be able to teach things that I am excited about and that I feel passionately about, and I need to be able to choose things, for the audience that is in front of me" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018). Given this perspective, Mr. Fitzgerald had embraced a culturally relevant curriculum that included a variety of multicultural texts such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Matt de la Pena's *Mexican White Boy,* Gene Leun Yang's *American Born Chinese,* the film version of Sherman Alexis's *Smoke Signals* as well as more canonical high school English books such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. However, even when teaching novels like *The Great Gatsby,* Mr. Fitzgerald approached the novel from a critical lens drawing students' attention to the role race, class, and gender play in the text. For example, Roger

explained how Mr. Fitzgerald encouraged them to look closely at the small details about racial bias evident within *The Great Gatsby*:

> There's a line in *Gatsby* where Nick was driving. He drove across the bridge, and I don't remember exactly what he said. Nick said that it was weird that there was a White chauffeur and two Black guys in the back of a limousine. I didn't catch it at first. I don't think any of us caught it at first. Mr. Fitzgerald read deep in it, and he said, "This is what it was like in the 1920s. Even though Nick wasn't really racist, he still was slightly racist" (Roger Interview #2, 4/10/2019).

Likewise, when I observed the class's discussion of the Great Gatsby, Mr. Fitzgerald pushed his students to think about how the issues of privilege are addressed in the novel. They discussed the difference between new money and old money, and the subtle ways F. Scott Fitzgerald eludes to issues of racism. Mr. Fitzgerald broke down a scene for his student stating, "Tom starts to talk about this book to sound smart – *Rise of the Colored Empires* – but he comes off as a racist rich White guy who likes things the way they are and is scared of change. Daisy exposes and humiliates him." They continued to read and a few sentences later Mr. Fitzgerald stopped them again, "There is a phrase I want you to pay attention to here – "the cruel rich" – it's a term that implies money brings power and permission" (Observation #2 Field Notes, 3/15/2019). As Mr. Fitzgerald broke down the novel with his students, he pushed them to look at it from a critical lens and think about the messages it sent about race, gender, class, and power.

Mr. Fitzgerald explained that one of his primary goals in the class is to "empower students to make observations" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018) thus he tried to

choose texts for which he felt his students would be likely to relate. Calvin described his appreciation for Mr. Fitzgerald's choice of text:

> Usually all my life I read books having to do with the White race, but now we will read books that have major questions in them. Like for *Mexican White Boy*, it's about this kid who is trying since he's mixed with Mexican and White, he's trying to find out what it is like to be Mexican, since he's grown up on his mother's side of the family, the White side, private school education, he has grown up with English and all that. So he's trying to find out about his Spanish side because his dad is Mexican…And I know that we all in some way, we're experiencing something like that, whether it be us or someone we know and we are trying to maybe help them out...I know we can all relate to it in a way, so that really gives us the opportunity to feel free to just speak and say, I think this because….it is good because you learn a whole lot from students as you do from your teacher (Calvin Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

For Calvin the material was relevant because for the first time he was seeing a consistent stream of work from authors of color which featured main characters who were also people of color, as such he felt that he and his classmates could more fully relate to the text and speak to the experiences of the characters. Because some students in the classroom had lived experiences that were similar to the experiences of the characters, the learning environment became one where students not only learned from the teacher but also learned from one another. This sense of classroom community strengthened Mr. Fitzgerald's relationship with his Black male students because it demonstrated that he valued their knowledge by situating himself as part of the classroom learning community

rather than as the person with all the answers and thus lessened the sense of a power dynamic in the classroom.

Practice #4: Preparing student for short and long term success.

> *"The best teacher's the one who makes himself progressively unnecessary*."
> –Mr. Fitzgerald

Mr. Fitzgerald believed his ultimate goal was to help prepare his students to be successful in his classroom and in the future. As he shared his teaching philosophy and the advice he had gotten from other teachers, he told me that one piece of advice that had stuck with him was the claim that "When you love someone, you care about their long term interest." Mr. Fitzgerald demonstrated care for his students through his strong content knowledge and dedicated preparation. He explained,

> There're certain teachers whose personalities are a force of nature; they're just magnetic…you drop them into a room full of adolescents and things are going to go well. I've always been somebody who had to plan out my lessons. When good things happen in my classroom, it's usually because I've orchestrated them, and that takes time (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2019).

To ensure that he knew the content well and that he was prepared to present it in a meaningful way for his students, Mr. Fitzgerald prepared each class meticulously. He planned out his questions in advance, and his copies of the texts were well-marked and clearly scrutinized. Mr. Fitzgerald not only carefully prepared each lesson, but he also extensively invested in his own preparation by continually seeking opportunities to deepen his understanding of the content and his craft. He shared,

> I love professional development things. I've been to a Gilder Lerhman session. It's a history non-profit, and they run these seminars for teachers at various

> college campuses that last a week. So two summers ago I was up at Dartmouth, learning all about American Indian history because I was teaching a novel, *Little Big Man* that was set in the American West. One of the nearby universities used to have this 'seminars for teachers' program, where we would go in for a day or two days with a professor about a particular topic. I've been to the NCTE conference, the Learning & the Brain conference. I love stuff like that (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

As a result of this preparation, Calvin noted, "What really stands out to me [about Mr. Fitzgerald's class] is that everything runs so smoothly. I've never been in a classroom that has had everything just run so well" (Calvin Interview #2, 4/30/2019). When Mr. Fitzgerald felt more prepared, he also felt more confident in the importance of his agenda, clearer in his expectations, and more capable of supporting his students' learning, so in order to prepare his students for their futures, he took this first step to prepare himself for the classroom.

Because of his own intense preparation and deep content knowledge, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to maintain high expectations for his students because he had the necessary skills and knowledge to help them meet those expectations. He hoped that by maintaining consistently high standards, he sent a message to his students, "We're not just killing time here." He expanded stating, "I'm always very clear with what my expectations are and also what my hopes are" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018). Mr. Fitzgerald had a sense of urgency that surrounded his teaching and that communicated to his students what we are doing here is important. For example, as the class reviewed the graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*, Mr. Fitzgerald lobbed questions at the students at

a rapid fire pace, and all students were fair game as Mr. Fitzgerald rotated between calling on those students who had their hands raised and calling on those who did not. Mr. Fitzgerald accepted and affirmed students' answers, but he also frequently pushed them to be more accurate or to expand on an answer, as he asked, "Can you be more specific?" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018). Calvin explained,

> He [Mr. Fitzgerald] wants to see what you think is going to happen…He wants to see your opinion on ideas you pull out of the story. He'll stop you and say, "Think about this" or "Take this idea that you just read and think about it in this way" or "Let's write that down in our notes and see what you can come up with"…He is not going to do all the thinking. He is going to make sure you do all your thinking (Calvin Interview #2, 4/20/2019).

Mr. Fitzgerald consistently challenged his students as he pushed them to develop their critical and analytic thinking skills.

Mr. Fitzgerald embodied a praxis of politicized care by regularly pushing students to produce their best work while also supporting them, so they felt confident stepping up to the challenge. His own deep knowledge of both English and Literature allowed him to support students as they worked to meet his high expectations. Roger told me that when they analyzed books in class, "You are not going in unguided or just reading, he [Mr. Fitzgerald] would point out specific things, so it changes your views on them" (Roger Interview #1, 2/15/2019). Calvin added, "I feel like he not only just teaches it, but he teaches it so you understand; he makes sure you understand" (Calvin Interview #2, 4/30/2019). I noticed that as the class read through parts of the novel together, Mr. Fitzgerald provided explicit guidance on specific lines or language to notice and to

annotate and asked questions to help his students unpack the subtleties of the text. For example, I observed the following instructional sequence as the class read a portion of *Mexican WhiteBoy*:

> Mr. Fitzgerald stops the student for a second after a section of the text that has Danny describing himself as a ladies-man, "You all should be laughing when you are reading that because it is hysterical. Put a mark here – how do we know this is a lie for Danny?"
>
> One student offers, "He is insecure."
>
> "What else do we know – give me instances when his quietness is on display?"
>
> Mr. Fitzgerald pushes the students to dig deeper.
>
> A student provides an example, "He can't even interact with Sophie's friends. How does he get girlfriends?"
>
> Mr. Fitzgerald builds upon this student's point, "So it seems indicative that he is not a ladies' man – he is uncomfortable in his own skin – it cannot be true – he includes it in the letter – because…."
>
> "If he is doing the right things – his father might come back to him," suggests a student.
>
> "And for his father what is the right thing?" asks Mr. Fitzgerald.
>
> "Getting girls," one student responds (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/18/2018).

In this sequence, Mr. Fitzgerald guided the students through a portion of the text to help them both recognize that Danny was lying and to help them unpack the character's underlying motivation for telling this lie. This type of guided reading and analysis was

representative of what I witnessed during each of the three formal observations in Mr. Fitzgerald's class.

Through his explicit instruction on how to critically analyze sections of a text, he set the students up to be successful and to have a deeper understanding of the literature they read.

Mr. Fitzgerald wanted to prepare his students with the necessary skills to independently analyze things they read in the future. He approached his lessons and instruction from the lens of, "what are they doing that is going to empower them to be okay without me" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2019). He particularly connected this concept to the prominence of the independent reading program in his curriculum. While he conscientiously chose each book he included in the course curriculum, he also realized that not every student would be engaged by those books, but "the power for you to pick your own books, develop your sort of own reading life. That's something that can last" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018). He wanted his students to develop a strong love of reading and to view themselves as capable readers, so they, like he, could become self-propelled life-long learners.

Both Calvin and Roger mentioned the profound impact the independent reading program had had on their reading lives both inside and outside the classroom. They both went from never really reading for pleasure to reading both inside the classroom and continuing to read their independent reading books in their free time. Calvin shared,

> Mr. Fitzgerald has inspired me to read more as a student because at first I was like, I don't want to sit up here and read this, textbooks are already hard enough, I am not trying to read this, but then I sit down, take one of Mr. Fitzgerald's books

> off the shelf. I'll sit down and read it for a second, and I'm like, 'Whoa, I want to keep reading;' I keep flipping pages, seeing chapters, going through these really thick books (Calvin Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

Similarly Roger noted,

> I used to read because I had to, but now the books Mr. Fitzgerald recommends for me, I love to read, and when I read them before class, it just gets me all comfortable. And I just know that I'm relaxed and I'm ready because the book just takes me to like a different world (Roger Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

I witnessed the two focal students' enthusiasm for reading during each of our interviews when Calvin and Roger passionately described the plots of their recent or current independent reading book which included *the Quarantine Series, Miracle's Boys, Star Wars, Dear Martin & The Rap Year Book.* One day when I arrived for our interview, I found Roger patiently waiting for me in the front office immersed in *Dear Martin*, his current independent reading book (Researcher Notes, 2/15/2019).

Mr. Fitzgerald invested in his students' futures both in the moment and in the long term. He told me that frequently seniors, who he had not taught since sophomore year, would reach out to him during their college application process looking to consult with him on their college essays. They so valued his opinion and expertise that he became an essential part of their college application process. Germaine, one of the seniors who served as a focal student for Mr. Nelson, told me, "He [Mr. Fitzgerald] was definitely one of my favorite teachers, and he helped me a lot with my college essays. He has been essential to the next steps of my life" (Germaine Interview #2, 4/9/2019). In this way Mr. Fitzgerald's impact went beyond the one year students were in his English class as he

ensured they were ready for their next steps beyond Corby. His focus on high expectations and preparation, while important for all students is essential for Black male students, who are often educationally neglected by their teachers. In demonstrating care and concern for his students' future, Mr. Fitzgerald continued to strengthen his relationships with them by working alongside them towards a common goal and showing them that their goals and aspirations mattered and were achievable.

Practice #5: Creating a space for conversations about race.

"He made us feel like he knows the struggle." - Roger

As previously described, Mr. Fitzgerald is very cerebral, very intellectually curious, a life-long learner. His love of learning caused him to approach concepts from a place of vulnerability where he prioritized listening to understand. This was how he approached life. This was how he approached his students. When I asked Mr. Fitzgerald if he did anything specific to build relationships with his Black male students, he was tentative, a bit unsure. He told me,

> When it comes to building relationships with Black students or students of any other background, I'm not... I'm not making different decisions in my approach. I think the biggest thing is what I mentioned earlier. When you're talking about a text that touches on a racially sensitive topic I'm just very aware of my skin color, and the way that my comments might be perceived by people who have different skin colors (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

He later reiterated this notion,

> I'm always aware when we're talking about race that I am a White man in the classroom, right? You want to tread carefully with "Let me explain your culture to

> you. Let me explain to you what your reaction to this should be." All you can do really is expose the author's intent, so I introduce *Mexican White Boy*…Sherman Alexie's *Smoke Signals*, the film. A lot of these texts have to do with ideas of Whiteness, ideas of cultural identity, relationships to fathers, and relationships to your own sense of self. They become the starting points for conversations (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

Mr. Fitzgerald was aware of his positionality in the classroom and as such did not try to position himself as the expert on other people's experiences but rather positioned himself as a co-learner. In all three of the classes I observed the literature was used as a springboard to discuss issues of identity, including but not limited to racial identity. In the lesson I observed on *Mexican White Boy*, most of the discussion centered around the dilemmas the main character faced as someone who was biracial and did not really know where he belonged (Observation #1, Field Notes, 12/18/2018). In another class as they reviewed a quiz on *American Born Chinese,* Mr. Fitzgerald encouraged the students "to examine the pictures and symbols of the novel, and they then briefly discussed the problematic thinking on display about how someone who is American is assumed to be an immigrant based on their looks or their racial background" (Observation #2 Field Notes, 3/15/2019). In the last class I observed, they discussed the ways power and privileged are attached both to males and social class (Observation #3 Filed Notes, 4/30/2019). His willingness to engage with his Black male students around issues that mattered to them was prominently displayed during these conversations as well as in an interaction he had with Calvin early in the second semester.

In January 2019 a video went viral of White students from Covington High, a Catholic school in Kentucky, in a confrontation with Native American groups on the National Mall. This video kicked off nationwide conversation on race and privilege. After a brief conversation in Mr. Fitzgerald's class on the incident, Calvin went home and investigated the issue further finding that students from Covington High had had an earlier incident where students had dressed in black face. Calvin explained,

> I looked them up, and it turns out that they have a history of racism towards African Americans. I was like, Mr. Fitzgerald, I did some homework on the Covington High kids, and I had seen that they had a history of racism. And I had found this case a few years ago when they had did black face at a game. So I was like, can we talk about this in class? He said, "Sure." And we did. It was an amazing discussion. He had formed three questions out of it. We answered all of them, even though we kept going back to the first one. But it was amazing. It was amazing to talk about what's happening in the world right now, so current events and what history we have on the Covington High kids who came up there and wrecked shop, and it's good…and it's good because that class is…is majority Black. Yes, it was majority Black, so it was good to talk about the kids and what if this photo of them in blackface depicted racism and whether or not we believe their comments on the situation (Calvin, Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

Mr. Fitzgerald claimed that this situation was in some ways an anomaly; he was not regularly pulling in students' suggestions for content, but even if it was an anomaly, Mr. Fitzgerald response in this moment demonstrated his praxis of politicized because he recognized and honored a need clearly expressed by one of his Black students to talk

about a racialized incident that was having an impact on him. His willingness to entertain Calvin's interest in the topic showed his understanding of how this event might be impacting his Black male student in a way that it was perhaps not impacting him.

Both Calvin and Roger believed Mr. Fitzgerald created a classroom space where they felt free to speak about matters of race because Mr. Fitzgerald displayed a great respect for the subject and for the students. Roger explained, "Even though Mr. Fitzgerald is Caucasian, I don't know, he made us feel like he knows the struggle" (Roger Interview #1, 2/15/2019). When I asked Roger to expand, he stated, "I feel like he probably wouldn't have gone through what we as African American students go through, but he's probably either experienced or seen one of his students go through it" (Roger Interview #2, 4/10/2019). Because of the way Mr. Fitzgerald positioned himself in the classroom, Roger believed Mr. Fitzgerald demonstrated an empathetic understanding of other's experiences even if he had not had those same experiences himself.

Furthermore, the focal students believed Mr. Fitzgerald was able to respectfully facilitate meaningful conversations about race because of his love of history, deep knowledge, and willingness to do the research. In reference to a classroom discussion concerning the use of black face, Roger described the way Mr. Fitzgerald approached the topic:

> He didn't just, like, force it on us. It's different because most teachers, especially in English class when they are doing something like that they just kind of force it on you. They don't give the background or anything. He gave us the background. Until this year, I had no idea what black face was or the black mask in a cage or something. I had no idea what that was, but Mr. Fitzgerald, he taught us what it

> was and where it came from and how they viewed us back in the days. First it was like, Wow. And it made us feel scared because we don't know, we're kids; we don't know. But Mr. Fitzgerald made us feel comfortable because he's like, not everybody's like that especially now; there are people who are different and have your backs and are here to support you, and will protect you. So that's kind of why we feel comfortable in Mr. Fitzgerald's class, and we talk with him, and we, like, go over the subject more deeply than we would in any other class (Roger Interview #1, 2/15/2019).

Roger felt that Mr. Fitzgerald didn't just breeze by or gloss over issues of race; he tried to make students understand the history and the context. As Roger reflected, "He wants us to expand our knowledge on what the world is and what it was" (Roger Interview #2, 4/10/2019). In these conversations around race, Mr. Fitzgerald not only wanted students to gain an intellectual understanding around the roots of racism but he also wanted to acknowledge their own experiences of racism in the current world.

To me it seemed that these difficult conversations centered on race might be easier to have in the class I observed since it was primarily students of color in comparison to Mr. Fitzgerald's honors classes that were typically more racially diverse. When I posed this question to Mr. Fitzgerald, he did not have a definitive answer, but he suggested I talk to Germaine, one of Mr. Nelson's focal students who was now a senior but who Mr. Fitzgerald had taught in his honors class sophomore year. When I posed the same question to Germaine, he responded,

> I think that issues come up when people of different races talk about race when one person feels that the other person doesn't fully respect or understand the

> position of the other group. I think that is when things get messy, when there is a disconnect or at least not a mutual understanding, or not an understanding but a respect of the topic. At that point ignorance can come in and tempers flare and stuff like that. I don't think that is there with Mr. Fitzgerald because he genuinely understands what is going on, and he understands why things are the way they are, not just from the text. I think he is very smart, is well read and he understands his life and how that interacts with people of color, things like that. I think that is why it feels so comfortable discussing things in that class. It is not just because they've read the book and the characters and want to continue with that, but because Mr. Fitzgerald allows for a level of comfortability when discussing difficult things. He is serious and he has respect for the actual events and the scenarios and the people that he's talking about (Germaine Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

It was Mr. Fitzgerald's deep and profound respect for history, for current events, and for the experiences of his students, especially his Black male students, that made his students willing to engage in discussions of race in class and to grapple with their own experiences of oppression in connection to the course content.

When I shared with Mr. Fitzgerald that his Black students expressed feeling comfortable discussing race in his classroom, and asked him how he set that tone, he responded that he believed it was essential to establish trust with his students before attempting to engage students in in-depth conversations about race:

> You don't try to have these conversations in week one or week two. You need to get a good chunk of the school year under your belt, which means that when we talk about teachers being able to design their own curriculum, the sequencing that

> I come up with is like I am hitting certain boxes at certain points. That's one of the things that I'm thinking about (Fitzgerald Interview #3, 3/15/2019).

Several months after I posed this question, he emailed me, wishing to expand upon his original answer,

> There was a question you once asked me, that I've never felt I answered completely, noting that a few of my Black students remarked that I spoke about race in a way they could relate to. You asked if I had had any formal training in this, and my answer was no. It's true that I never took a class or workshop about 'talking about race in the classroom,' but I have absolutely received an education from reading writers like Ta-Nehisi Coates and Nikole Hannah-Jones, without whom I would be lost (personal communication, 9/22/2019).

Mr. Fitzgerald successfully created a comfortable space for his Black male students to discuss race in the classroom because he consistently sought out perspectives outside of his own to help him better understand and make sense of the world.

Through the combination of interacting with his students in a humanizing way, allowing students opportunities for redemption, engaging students as active participants in their own learning, preparing students for the future, and making space for conversation about race, over time, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to maintain productive relationship with his Black male students. Both his enactment of these particular practices, and the manner in which he actualized each practice was to some extent impacted by the dimensions of Mr. Fitzgerald's personal identity, in particular his status as a White male English teacher.

Influence of dimensions of identity on relational practices.

In this section, I explore research question two: *How does a teacher's identity – particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role – influence the ways they initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students?* I describe how each of these dimensions of Mr. Fitzgerald's identity - race, gender, life experience, and role - influenced how he actualized the relationally effective practices described in the previous section. Similar to Mrs. Compass, the manner by which Mr. Fitzgerald enacted his relationally effective practices was influenced to some extent by his race and gender but seemed to be more profoundly influenced by his life experience, his sense of self-efficacy, and his role as an English teacher.

Race. Mr. Fitzgerald's position as a White male in a classroom predominately made up of students of color had an influence on how he built relationships with his Black male students. His racial identity caused him to consider how he positioned himself in the classroom, where he asserted authority, and where he asserted expertise. He recognized that because he did not share the same racial background as his students, it was important that he incorporate content in his curriculum that might more closely reflect the experiences of his students and when discussing the ideas in these texts, he allowed his students to be the experts of their own experience. He also accepted that when initiating relationships with Black male students, it may take longer than with his students with whom he shared a similar racial background. As Roger explained,

> For me, as an African-American boy, I probably would feel safer, quicker with an African-American teacher. Still again, I will keep my guard up because you'll

> never know, but for others here, I'm not completely sure (Roger Interview #2, 4/30/2019).

Since Mr. Fitzgerald recognized how fragile and necessary trust was for building that positive relationship with his Black male students, he seemed to be ever vigilant about the assessments and assumptions he made regarding students. This vigilance was demonstrated when he described how he addressed an issues of what appeared to be academic dishonesty with one of his Black male students early on in the year,

> I didn't catch him in a moment of academic dishonesty, so I'm not one hundred percent sure. But it seemed like it was the case, and I talked to him after class about it...And that's always like a very difficult situation to navigate because you don't want to accuse a kid particularly early in the year that can crush your relationship if you are coming down on a kid for something he did not do, but you also need to let him know that you're paying attention. So you find yourself using phrases like “this just struck me,” “I noticed that this happened,” “can you give me an explanation for this?” And “I just want to make sure that you're doing things the right way. I just want to make sure you’re not cheating yourself out of an education,” so you're having the conversation without using that accusatory language (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/6/2018).

Mr. Fitzgerald’s awareness of how defeating a false accusation could be demonstrated how thoughtful he was about his interactions with students. While he never directly connected his careful choice of language or the opportunities he offered students for redemption to the racial background of his students, it seemed that while these practices were important for all students – his approach was particularly important for a White

teacher interacting with Black male students. By secondary school, many Black male students have already had negative past experiences with White teachers, and thus, they may default to an assumption of malicious intent from a White teacher. In fact, both Calvin and Roger referenced negative interactions they had had with teachers in the past that they saw as being fueled by racism. Calvin described,

> Teachers will come in with all types of stereotypes, but I don't think they do a good job at hiding because I would catch on almost instantaneously. I would go home and just be like "Oh my God, they said this. They said all Black males are this'…Growing up, if you were someone of color, if you were someone in that Asian, blue, Black, no matter what you were, it was always something wrong with you because that's who you are" (Calvin, Interview #2, 4/30/2019).

Similarly Roger told me, "And then I remember in middle school, it was a couple of teachers. I don't remember specifics, but I know that I had a lot of encounters because of my skin color, and it was just like, Wow!" (Roger Interview #2, 4/10/2019). Thus, Mr. Fitzgerald's intentionality in approaching interactions with students from an inquiry-based and solution-oriented stance as well as his expectations that trust is built over time allowed him to overcome some of the students' perceptions of White teachers as not to be trusted.

Gender. While Mr. Fitzgerald's Whiteness might have posed an initial barrier to connection with his Black male students, other dimensions of his personal identity supported his initial connection with his Black male students. For instance, his gender and particularly his status as an alumnus of Corby High School aided him in building a connection with students. Each student that I spoke to about Corby mentioned the

importance of the "brotherhood" they experienced there. As a Corby alumnus, Mr. Fitzgerald was automatically a part of that brotherhood. Mr. Fitzgerald told me, "The fact that I went to school here means a lot to them – I was in their desks. I had some teachers they now have. I think that matters to them as well" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2019). Even though they may not have shared the same racial history, Mr. Fitzgerald's status as a Corby alumnus, created a shared history for him and his students that he could leverage as an initial point of connection and understanding.

However, the intersectionality of Mr. Fitzgerald's race and gender could create a possibility for tension in his relationship with Black male students since as a White man Mr. Fitzgerald represented the epitome of privilege and institutional oppression. Thus, he had to be aware of his position within the classroom, be careful about where he asserted authority, and find ways to work with his students as to lessen the sense of a power dynamic in the relationship, so he maintained his Black male students' trust.

Life experience. In addition to his race and gender, Mr. Fitzgerald's life experience and current life stage influenced his approach to relationships with his students. Mr. Fitzgerald is in his mid-thirties and had been teaching at Corby for thirteen years, so he was no longer the young teacher who could leverage his proximal age as a point of connection. However, he could leverage his many years of experience at the school. He told me that some of his comfort in addressing race in his classroom came from,

> Just working with students from different backgrounds over the course of thirteen years, you get a feeling for where they are coming from…Your own times as a teacher becomes an education for you. It's being able to have the right words, the

> right phrases at your disposal, when you engage in sensitive conversations (Fitzgerald Interview #3, 3/15/2019).

Mr. Fitzgerald's experience coupled with his general intellectual curiosity allowed him to learn from each class of students and thus over time become more adept at how he approached building relationships with all students, including his Black male students. He asserted that his experience in the classroom gave him a greater sense of confidence regarding his ability to meet the needs of his students, and he felt that with that confidence he had developed a stronger ability to both manage the classroom and demand more from his students. He explained,

> My first year teaching, I was incredibly insecure in my own abilities. In terms of classroom management, the side conversation would be happening, and I'd almost feel guilty shutting them down because I'm thinking what I'm doing right here, probably isn't worth them paying attention to anyway. But when you put the preparation into it, and you become more confident in what you're able to present, you project a sense that this time together is important. This affects the quickness with which you respond to students getting distracted, students not doing what they're supposed to be doing in that particular moment. Any authority I summon in a classroom stems from that preparedness and confidence (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

With time and experience, Mr. Fitzgerald developed a greater sense of self-efficacy as a teacher which resulted in him upholding higher expectations for his students.

Mr. Fitzgerald is also the father of two young boys, and he reflected that his responsibilities as a father could at time make it difficult to give as much time to his teaching as he would like,

> I'm now the father of two young boys: three years old and nine months old. And my wife is also a teacher. And so just finding the time that you need to outside of the classroom, away from them to be a) as prepared as you want to be, and b) catching up on the grading the way that you want to - that's the biggest challenge right now (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

While Mr. Fitzgerald coached JV lacrosse in the past and was previously more involved in the community of the school beyond his classroom, the demands on his time at home have caused him to significantly cut back on those types of activities. Consequently, he found it even more essential to carve out time during class and make space within the curriculum to build his relationship with students.

Institutional role. Finally, Mr. Fitzgerald's position as an English teacher made it possible for him to cultivate rich moments of connection through the course content. He expressed, "It's hard to feel like their voice is being validated through an algebra equation. It's an advantage that I have that other teachers don't" (Fitzgerald Interview #3, 3/15/2019). This advantage came not only from his role as an English teacher but also from his position as an English teacher at Corby, a parochial high school where he had almost complete control over the curriculum. He reflected that this aspect of his teaching was essential for building relationship with his students through the content:

> If we're going to agree that relationships are foundational to successful education, you can't put a teacher on a script. It's like those two things can't exist

> concurrently in the classroom. Very much like the books that I'm choosing, the way that I've constructed the curriculum, this is an expression of me - this is part of the relationship that's about to form (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018).

Thus Mr. Fitzgerald's ability to both forefront content that he was knowledgeable about and that he believed would appeal to his particular students provided him the opportunity to create a classroom environment where he engaged his students as partners in their own learning. The establishment of this type of classroom environment where all members of the classroom were co-learners laid a foundation for Mr. Fitzgerald to establish productive relationships with his Black male students.

At the same time his role as an English teacher could at times create barriers to productive relationships as English was a required class that students had to take and also was a class where the grade tended to matter in terms of access to future opportunities.

Overall while Mr. Fitzgerald's race, gender, life experience, and institutional role seemed to all influence his relational practices, it appeared that his role as an English teacher was the factor that most clearly facilitated his ability to form productive relationships with his Black male students.

Mr. Nelson

"He's definitely a trademark or definitely, like a key point in the experience here. I think without him there'd definitely be something missing." – Germaine

Participant profile.

On the first day I go to observe Mr. Nelson's class, I walk behind the admissions building and through an outdoor eating area set with picnic tables to a small white building on the outer edge of Corby's campus. I walk into a room that looks perhaps like a hoarding grandmother's attic with something stashed in every last nook and cranny. Bright vibrant art work hangs from the walls – some of it created by students, some of it Mr. Nelson's own. He has a self-portrait hanging up, a picture of what I presume is a younger him standing at a crossroads in front of a stop sign, and then there is Black Jesus being offered a chapstick – the picture of the students who posed for the painting is proudly hung alongside. Other artwork lines the walls as well – even the windows and doors have been turned into pieces of art.

In the back of the room on one-side hangs a sign "Mr. Nelson's Man Cave" with a pair of Cleveland Browns helmets on each side and on the other side hangs a banner commemorating Mr. Nelson's 25th anniversary at Corby. In the center of the room are old metal art tables in a four by two square that in total accommodate ten students; additional tables are pushed up against the outer wall. Each seat has a stool and when students are seated at both the inner and outer tables, their backs almost touch. In addition to the outer tables, the outside walls are covered with drawers filled with arts supplies and tall thin cardboard boxes containing Plexiglas or poster board lean up against the wall. In the back corner is an easel with a work in progress. In the center of the middle tables is a mishmash of things – an old cows' skull, some plants, some antique lanterns and what

appears to perhaps be a water pump; there are doo-dad and odds and ends everywhere. The students are using them as models for their still lives.

Amidst all the chaos is Mr. Nelson, a sixty-year old Black man with a bald head and a greying beard and mustache, who wears a well-worn Cleveland Browns apron splattered with dry paint. He walks about the small room helping students get the supplies they need, so they can get settled and started on the day's work (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/13/2018).

I originally met with Mr. Nelson on a Saturday at his weekend job. On that day, we spoke for almost two hours as he recounted his life story. He shared that he is the fifth son, and sixth child of his mother's nine children. He grew up not far from Corby High School in a historically Black neighborhood; however, his neighborhood was located within a primarily White county, so he attended predominately White public schools throughout his childhood; in high school he was one of only 26 Black students in the school, 24 of whom came from his neighborhood. During elementary school, he was placed in special education classes and attended four schools in five years. He claimed art and football kept him interested in school, and he went on to attend a historically Black university (HBCU) not far from his home town. After college, he held a variety of jobs while trying to make it as an artist; he eventually took a steadier full time job as a garbage collector for the city, so he could better support his young family. While working as a garbage collector, he took a part time job as a high school football coach, and it was this coaching position that led him to consider a career in teaching. He eventually left his job with the city and returned to school to get a Master's in Education. He took his first full

time teaching job at Corby High School in 1992 and has been there ever since (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018).

For the last twenty-seven years, Mr. Nelson has and continues to form strong relationships with all of his students, but particularly his Black male students. In this section, I describe the six relational practices Mr. Nelson used to initiate and maintain relationships with his Black male students: 1) transparency - sharing his story, having honest conversations, and candidly discussing race; 2) mentoring students; 3) interacting with students in a humanizing manner; 4) actively participating in the school community; 5) preparing students for short and long term success; and 6) engaging students as active participants in their own learning.

Practice #1: Transparency - sharing his story, having honest conversations, and candidly discussing race.

"I reach them by giving them the truth." – Mr. Nelson

Mr. Nelson is a talker and a straight shooter. When he had something to say or an opinion to express, he did so directly. His honesty was one of the primary ways he developed relationships with his student. He believed, when connecting with students, "the number one thing is being honest with them" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). Mr. Nelson kept it real with his students regardless of the topic, question, or situation; he admitted, "I tell them everything" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). He openly shared his life story with his students and imparted on to them the lessons he had learned over the course of his life. Among other things, he shared with students that his brother was gay and had died of AIDS, his own struggles in school due to his learning disability, his experience being in an inter-racial relationship with his ex-wife who is Latina, and

experiences where he had encountered racism throughout his life. His candor allowed his students either to recognize their own experience in his stories or to be able to see things from other perspectives. I witnessed Mr. Nelson's candor in action one day as I sat in the back of the art room observing,

> A student asks if he can leave class and go over to the main building to get something. Mr. Nelson tells him, "Yes, but you need to get into uniform because the back part of your shirt is untucked." "Why you looking at his ass – you gay?" one of his students asks. Rather than negatively reacting or automatically shutting the student down, Mr. Nelson poses a question to him, "What's wrong with people who are gay? I am going to tell you something – my brother was gay, and he died of AIDS." The student takes this information in clearly considering the offensiveness of what he has just said, and the conversation dies down (Observation #3 Field Notes, 2/13/2019).

During this interaction, Mr. Nelson shared his own experience as a way to turn a moment of student ignorance into a teachable moment that would perhaps influence the students' thinking in the future. This incident is representative of how Mr. Nelson shared his own experiences to create small teachable moments, which he wove into his teaching during the course of each day.

By openly sharing his story and the experiences that had made him who he is, mistakes and all, Mr. Nelson embodied a practice of politicized care by communicating to students that he would accept them for who they were and that they could share themselves with him without fear of judgement. He explained that he was "being honest with them, being straightforward with them, and trying to reach them. Let them

understand that we've all got all kinds of things going on in life" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). He hoped his students would come to understand that everyone has a story and that their struggles do not need to define them.

Additionally, by sharing his stories, Mr. Nelson allowed his students, particularly his Black male students an opportunity to see themselves in his stories and to learn from his experiences. Darius shared,

> I have two Black teachers, Mr. Barnes and Mr. Nelson who I think I relate with on different types of level because I guess that's just what I grew up around. They seem like my uncles and stuff like that. They've shared some of the same experiences that I'm going through now, and they've passed it and succeeded from it and gone through it, so it's good to talk to them about things that go down like that (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

Darius felt that Mr. Nelson's experiences, particularly his experiences as a Black man could help him learn how to navigate similar situations, and thus appreciated Mr. Nelson's willingness to share and discuss those experiences.

Mr. Nelson not only openly shared his life experience but also created space in his class for casual conversation with students around a variety of topics. Germaine explained that in Mr. Nelson's class there were opportunities for "casual conversation" that included "man conversation, school conversation, art conversation, all kinds of stuff" (Germaine Interview #1, 2/13/2019). In reference to the topics of these conversations, James described, "It's just basically what's going on outside the art room. It could be like championship sports. It could even be race. It could be anything. It's just really what someone wants to talk about" (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019). Mr. Nelson's willingness

to make time for casual conversation and to engage in these conversations with his students created opportunities for him and his students to participate in straightforward discussions about a variety of topics that mattered to students including racial identity and experiences with racism.

Mr. Nelson's classroom was a space where his Black male students could deepen their racial identity and could feel free to both name and process issues of race and racism. Mr. Nelson took multiple opportunities to ensure that students understood their history. He told me that when trying to reach his Black male students the focus was "history, history, history." He found that his Black male students were "so far removed from history" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2019). He further explained,

> Everything that's happening right now: the domino effect that's happened from generation to generation to generation. Now the country is so full of so many things that with all the good stuff going on everybody's like, "Okay, we have changed." We hope we have changed, but our president has proven to us that we still need a lot of work" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2019).

Mr. Nelson wanted to ensure that through the conversations in his classroom, his Black male students developed an understanding of the history of oppression in the U.S. and how it informed their experience and opportunities as Black male youth. At the same time, he also wanted them to recognize the proud legacy of their ancestors who had resisted the oppression and made valuable contributions to our society. Furthermore, he hoped these conversations would provide his Black male students an opportunity to process their experiences of racism and raise issues of concern. He explained, "I tell my story as a Black kid, and they always ask me, "Have you ever been assaulted? Have you

been called the N word?" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2019). The students felt comfortable asking Mr. Nelson these questions because they knew he would answer them honestly and provide valuable insight on the issue.

While he created space for race-related conversations within his art classes, he also took on roles outside of the classroom, particularly as a moderator of the Black Student Union (BSU) that provided him an opportunity to have more extended conversations with students around these issues. During BSU meetings, the Black students at Corby had an opportunity to come together and more formally discuss topics such as coding switching, the shooting of unarmed Black men, several high profile incidents of White politicians dressing in blackface, and gentrification, which is a major concern in the region where Corby is located. Brandon expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to participate in these honest conversations with Mr. Nelson and his fellow moderator of the BSU:

> There are cultural topics that I think Black student in particular should be aware of going on when you move into the real world. You should be consciously aware of what people are saying and what things are going on (Brandon Interview #2, 4/16/2019).

James similarly explained how the discussions in the BSU had benefitted him:

> Junior and senior year I became more aware and conscious about my Blackness, I guess, just because at my grade school, we were all Black. We didn't really interact with White people. So I feel like BSU is really important, like the topics they [the moderators] would bring up, they really helped me think (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019).

Thus, many of the Black male students at Corby appreciated having a space where they could converse with adult Black men and explore their racial identities.

While BSU was a dedicated space to have these conversations, Mr. Nelson ensured that conversation about race were not just relegated to that space but were broached at any time. By candidly fore-fronting issues of race and racism rather than pretending they didn't exist, Mr. Nelson forged a connection with his Black male students around their common experiences and developed a deeper relationship with them by demonstrating his politicized care for them as Black male youth in a society that can often be hostile to Black men. For example, he described why he addressed the topic of police brutality with his students, explaining, "I'm just trying to teach them to be aware. Unfortunately police kill; it's nothing new" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). He wanted his Black male students to be aware of the situations they may encounter and have a sense of how to navigate them.

Mr. Nelson also noted that these candid conversations were not only beneficial for his Black students but were equally important in forging relationships with his White students. Mr. Nelson told all of his students regardless of their race, "I don't have the answer to Black culture. I can only tell you from my experience, but anything you ever wanted to ask a Black adult or a Black male, you can ask me" (Nelson Interview #3, 3/15/2019). He believed a primary purpose of teaching was to promote racial unity among the students at Corby High School. He explained that he frequently told his Black students, "Don't treat my White students or your White brothers any worse. Treat them like they're your blood and your family. We are all one Corby; we've got to live that" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/1018). Therefore, he was transparent about who he was, what

he believed, and what he had seen in hopes that his White and Black students would have a greater understanding of each other's histories and thus develop a greater empathy for one another.

In his art room. Mr. Nelson enacted a praxis of politicized care, recognizing that the societal changes that will be necessary to improve the life experiences of his Black male students are changes that require a larger societal shift. Thus, he believed that part of his role as a teacher was to help all his students regardless of their race develop a greater understanding and empathy for one another. This was best exemplified in a story he shared about one of his White students,

> This young man was in a class where that particular year there were three White students in the class. My class was a little bit more than fifteen students. The conversation was about police brutality. Unbeknownst to anybody in the room, both his parents were cops. Of course, this did not go over well. He's like "Okay you're talking about White cops. My parents are cops. They're not like these people who have done these horrible things." He would stay out there [the art building] and talk to me. He felt comfortable talking to me. (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018).

After having several conversations with the student, Mr. Nelson invited the student to come to a BSU meeting, and the student came and the continued to attend the meetings regularly. The student later wrote a paper in which he commented on how this experience had made him much more empathetic to the plight of his Black classmates and given him an increased awareness of the ways they regularly encountered discrimination (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018).

Mr. Nelson's sharing of his himself and his story as well as his commitment to having an open dialogue about race and other important topics helped all of his students, but particularly his Black male students, gain a greater sense of identity. Due to Mr. Nelson's transparency, he was able to form and maintain productive relationship with all his students but particularly his Black male students.

Practice #2: Mentoring students.

"I think a lot of us benefit from his wisdom." – Germaine

Many of the focal students described Mr. Nelson not only as a teacher but also as a mentor: a wise, experienced and approachable adult who was guiding them as they transitioned toward adulthood. James claimed that Mr. Nelson had been both a mentor and teacher to him. When I asked James to explain the distinction between the two roles, he stated, "I think mentors are more personal…they're there to help you grow" (James Interview #2, 4/24/2019). Many of the Black male students at Corby viewed Mr. Nelson as a mentor because he was invested in students' personal development, provided them with life advice, advised them on personal issues, and made sure students felt a part of the Corby community.

Mr. Nelson believed his role as a teacher encompassed much more than simply teaching the subject matter. He explained, "I really use my art room as a platform to talk about life. Being a man…responsibility…all the things that happen in the society and where we are right now" (Nelson Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Mr. Nelson was known for frequently dispensing small pieces of life advice; he did so in the art room, in the hallways, in BSU, or wherever else he could get his students to listen. He coined his oft repeated phrases – "Nelsonisms" – as he explained they came from his "personal belief

and philosophy based on my life experience" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). His advice covered a wide range of topics. Some days it was just a general philosophical statement on how students should approach life: "Every day's a gift. Be happy that you're alive, and you're able to live and create" (Brandon Interview #1, 1/24/2019). On other days it was more practical: "If you get a good coat of wax on a car the dirt will protect the paint" (Observation #3 Field Notes, 2/13/2019). And sometimes it was targeted to what an individual student needed to hear: "You have a natural gift. Use it. Don't let your friends hold you back" (Nelson Interview #2, 12/13/2018). Brandon recounted how on the first day of class rather than spend a lot of time going over the syllabus, requirements, and classroom rules as was the common routine in most classes, Mr. Nelson began class with his philosophy of life:

> On the first day of class, I do remember he told us that every day is a gift and he said like every day is his birthday because he gets a present just waking up…You shouldn't take it for granted. Be happy that you're alive, and you're able to live and create…on the first day of class for like other classes they will be like you need this, you need this, and he said that, but it was a different pace at which the class was going, so he just had more of a platform to speak about life as opposed to the subject, finals, midterms, AP tests, how the course will be graded (Brandon Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

In these first moments of class, Mr. Nelson established himself as a mentor and someone who deeply cared about his students by communicating to them that their development as people came before the course content.

Mr. Nelson took every available opportunity to mentor his students collectively through his life advice, but students also often sought him out for more personal individualized advice. Because of his openness, students trusted Mr. Nelson and viewed him as a personable and approachable adult. Consequently, students often sought him out when they needed advice on a variety of issues in their lives. Mr. Nelson told me, "I give them time; they come talk to me. I've had so many kids come over the years, come to talk to me about their personal lives" (Nelson Interview #3, 3/15/2019). James similarly noted how students frequently took their problems to Mr. Nelson, "There have been students who if they have problems, they go to Mr. Nelson to talk about them" (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019). When I asked James why he thought students chose to take their problems to Mr. Nelson in particular, he reflected,

> I think because he is an approachable person, and he'll actually take time to listen to what you have to say if it's serious. I think that's why people come to him…I think people are just less intimidated by him so they come to him with their problems (James Interview #2, 4/24/2019).

Students, particularly, Black male students can be afraid to bring their problems or concerns to adults within a school for fear that rather than help them teachers may hold their concerns against them. However, since his Black male students viewed Mr. Nelson as both someone who was non-judgmental and as someone who understood and looked like them, they were more willing to open up to him and put their trust in him.

While often students sought Mr. Nelson out for advice on their own accord, Mr. Nelson also looked out for students and proactively engaged with those students who seemed lost or in need of guidance. He told me, "When I see my students, I'm looking at

can I help them" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2019). He exemplified this assertion with a story about Byron, a sophomore at Corby. Mr. Nelson was at a regional high school fair representing Corby when a mother came up to the table with her eighth grade son. She shared with Mr. Nelson that her older son was currently a sophomore at Corby but was unhappy there and contemplating leaving. Mr. Nelson asked if he could go over and speak with her older son, and the mother gave her blessing. He didn't recognize the boy and hadn't met him before, but he took the time to chat with him and to figure out why he was so unhappy at Corby. After Byron explained, Mr. Nelson told him,

> "I'm going to help you. I want you to stay here [at Corby]. In fact, I'm adopting you today. You're going to become my next son." He said, "I have a dad and mom." I said, "I understand, but when you're here at Corby, you're my son. All the kids are my sons."

The next week, Mr. Nelson went and found Byron; he got his work study placement switched to the art room and worked to find some activities that Byron could get involved in, so he would feel connected to the Corby community (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2019). As demonstrated in this anecdote about Byron, Mr. Nelson took time to initiate relationships with all students even those who may not be registered in one of his classes or have any regular or formal interaction with him. He took students under his wing and made them a part of his family – he got to know them as people and connected with them on that level, so they knew that at least one person at Corby was looking out for them. James summed up Mr. Nelson's role as a mentor well when he stated, "He does help you if you need help. I see him as a good teacher; a good person" (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019). Most students were willing to engage in an interpersonal relationship with

Mr. Nelson because they recognized that he would support them and was invested in their growth as people, one of the essential elements of a praxis of politicized care. This feeling was especially prevalent among the Black male students who had few other Black male teachers at Corby.

Practice #3: Interacting with students in a humanizing manner.

"Every kid in the school is my son." Mr. Nelson

Another way Mr. Nelson was able to successfully engage his Black male students in productive relationships was that he paid attention to them and authentically engaged with them. He gave his students the acknowledgement and attention they needed, accepted them for who they are, and engaged with them on a personal level. He viewed all the students at Corby as part of his extended family and treated them as such. He described, "Every kid in the school is my son. That's what I tell them all. Every kid is named George" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). The name George was Mr. Nelson's clever nod to George Foreman who named each of his sons after himself. For Mr. Nelson, it was his term of endearment for his students and was meant to communicate that he cared for them as he cared for his own son.

One way Mr. Nelson demonstrated this care was through small gestures of daily acknowledgement. James described how Mr. Nelson went out of his way to acknowledge him, "When I see him walking the hallways, every time he sees me, he always walks up to me and says, 'Hi'" (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019). Calvin commented on what these small acknowledgements meant to him, "He's a really friendly person, and he just knows how to make your day a little bit better than it came out to be" (Calvin Interview #2, 1/24/2019). One day, as I walked with Mr. Nelson from the main

building back to the art room, I witnessed this recognition in action. It was a warm May day, and the students, who had just finished lunch, were heading to their classes. Many of them crossed our path as we walked, and they all greeted Mr. Nelson or he greeted them. Some students he acknowledged with a, "How's it going George?" With others, he shared a quick joke. More than once a student shouted at him down the sidewalk, "Nelson!" (Researcher note, May 2019). During our interview, Germaine described that what I witnessed that day was not an exception but rather a representation of Mr. Nelson's typical interactions with students: "I see him around the hallways and most of the students who have had him usually say something to Nelson. No one. No one ignores him ever" (Germaine Interview #1, 12/13/2018). Likewise, Brandon shared that before he took Mr. Nelson's class, he had witnessed these types of friendly interactions between Mr. Nelson and his students in the hallways, and that these observations helped him form a positive initial impression of Mr. Nelson:

> I've seen him around campus a lot…He's more personable, and really acts nice to his students, so when you see him in the hallway, and other students are like "Hey, Nelson, how you doing?" I knew it would be a more relaxed environment (Brandon Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

Through these small daily acts of recognition, Mr. Nelson enacted a praxis of politicized care by ensuring his students were seen. As I walked with him that day, the sincere love between him and his students was palpable.

Mr. Nelson not only made sure to acknowledge students in the hallways, but he also acknowledged their presence in the classroom. He let students know they mattered

by paying attention to their presence and greeting each one as he entered the classroom. One day when I observed,

> A student walks into the room and offers Mr. Nelson an enthusiastic greeting. Mr. Nelson asks him where he's been, and the student responds asking if they have started working on a new project yet. In a good-natured and joking manner, Mr. Nelson responds, well you haven't been here in so long, you wouldn't know (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/13/2018).

In this short exchange, Mr. Nelson communicated to the student that his absence was noticed, and thus reinforced that both the student and his presence mattered to Mr. Nelson.

In addition to these small daily gestures inside and outside of the classroom, Mr. Nelson also took advantage of other opportunities to communicate to students that they mattered to him. He shared,

> One of the things we do on senior retreat is we ask parents and family members to write letters to their sons, and they give them [the letters] to them [the students]. Two years ago I decided – because sometime kids don't get any letters – so they ask staff. I decided to write a general letter and hand write every senior's name on one of those letters. I gave the letter to every senior" (Nelson Interview #2, 12/13/2018).

Through these small acknowledgements of students, Mr. Nelson demonstrated that he recognized his students and cared for them not only as students but also as people.

Mr. Nelson willingly gave his students his time and made sure he paid attention to their needs. He recognized that many of his students "are starving for attention" (Nelson

Interview #1, 9/29/2018), so he prioritized establishing a human connection with his students and authentically engaged with them on a more personal level both inside and outside the classroom. James described how he appreciated having the opportunity to engage in authentic conversation with Mr. Nelson. As the Vice President of the BSU, James said he would often stay after their meetings to talk with Mr. Nelson and his co-moderator, Mr. Barnes:

> We would always have discussions after just to talk about stuff, and they would always lead to different topics and all that...I feel like those times we're very significant to me just because it was kind of nice to just talk to an adult and, uh, just have a conversation with them. It didn't even have to be about anything like extremely important. Just to talk (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019).

The attention Mr. Nelson and Mr. Barnes gave James in these moments was more important than the topics they discussed; James appreciated these moments because Mr. Nelson and Mr. Barnes made him feel seen. Mr. Nelson recognized that each encounter he had with students provided him with an opportunity to build them up or tear them down. He shared an anecdote about an encounter he had recently had with one of his students that reminded him how important it is to pay attention to each interaction he has with his students:

> A kid came in my office the other day; he's one of my students. I had him last year. He's a junior. He walks in, and I didn't realize. You really got to pay attention to all the students in-depth. He came in, and he said something about he couldn't get this done because of this. I just kind of jokingly said, “I don't want to

> hear about your problems." It just destroyed him. I corrected it real quick, but then it made me realize not to ever judge or misjudge.

Mr. Nelson recognized that to ensure students felt heard and validated it was important to address their concerns with seriousness and care. Students wanted to feel that their concerns were acknowledged, and Mr. Nelson made a concerted effort to ensure he treated his students in this way.

Mr. Nelson further validated his Black male students' humanity by accepting them for their authentic selves and engaging with them in a more personal and culturally familiar manner. As I interviewed students about Mr. Nelson, the word "vibe" was mentioned multiple times to explain the culture in Mr. Nelson's classroom. In the initial short profile I wrote about Mr. Nelson and shared with his students, I noted, "The word "vibe" is used multiple times to explain the culture in Mr. Nelson's room. Students tell me it just has a different "vibe" which they all attribute to the laidback and relaxed atmosphere of the art building, which is set off from the rest of the school and at times feels like a culture all its own" (Research memo). When I asked Darius to review the profile and comment on its accuracy, he told me, "These first two sentences are really accurate about what it is in the building. It's very vibe-centric. It's a little bit more comfortable" (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

In general the art room had a more laidback and informal structure than most other classrooms in the school. This atmosphere created opportunities for more personal interactions between Mr. Nelson and his students. I noted during my first observation, "The students work, but there is a low level of chatter that goes on throughout the room amongst the students; other students have earphones in and listen to music as they work"

(Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/13/2018). The students' interactions with Mr. Nelson are also more informal:

> As students walk into the room, many of them refer to Mr. Nelson simply as "Nelson" – having dispensed of the more formal "Mr." before his name. More than one student comes over and rubs his bald head. James rubs Mr. Nelson's head and says, "Look, he could be Mr. T." Mr. Nelson is unfazed and jones right back…There are both Black and White students in the classroom, all of whom are engaged in the conversations, but it appears that the Black students are the ones who most freely banter back and forth with Mr. Nelson (Observation #1 Field Notes 12/13/2018).

Although Mr. Nelson is sixty, many of the students described him as young at heart, personable, and relatable. Brandon explained, "It was kind of like he was one of us at times even though he was a teacher, he would know how we talk to each other and kind of do it to us" (Brandon Interview #2, 4/16/2019). Germaine also noted how Mr. Nelson seemed to better understand his Black male students and their typical modes of interaction and communication:

> He's also the only Black teacher I've had so far. And I have nothing against my other White teachers, but it is definitely something different, and I think that a lot of people may not subconsciously acknowledge that – they kind of – they notice it, but then, when they're experiencing Nelson as a teacher, there is definitely different energy in the class and he understands the students (Germaine Interview #1, 2/13/2019).

Mr. Nelson's ability to engage with the students, particularly his Black male students, in a manner and style that were familiar to them gave them the opportunity to let down their guard and more fully be themselves when they were in his classroom. Germaine expressed that Mr. Nelson's class was definitely "a lower point in the day" where he could de-stress and let go. He added, "We have to be quiet pretty much the entire day – but [in the art room] you can actually have a dialogue with the teacher." Since Mr. Nelson spoke and joked with his Black male students in a manner they were familiar with, they felt accepted for who they were and felt they could more fully be themselves in his classroom. Open communication with students and recognition of students' full humanity are two foundational elements of politicized care. Mr. Nelson showed this type of care for his students by consistently acknowledging them, paying attention to their concerns, and making them feel that in his room they could be accepted for who they are, and thus, he was able to initiate and maintain productive relationships with his Black male students.

Practice #4: Actively participating in the school community.

"The kids they want you there." – Mr. Nelson

Mr. Nelson was highly involved in the Corby High School community, and as a result was ever present in the daily lives of his students. Mr. Nelson got to know many students earlier on in their Corby experience before they even had him as a teacher. For the past several years, Mr. Nelson has run a freshmen orientation session called the Flags of Diversity project, where students research their family heritage and create a flag to represent their family background. He explained, "This project is like an icebreaker. It's

one of the first things they do" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). Mr. Nelson described that the goal of the Flags of Diversity project was,

> Just building relationships and getting to know we're together… For example, I decided because of Collin Kapernick, I said I am going to take Flags of Diversity to another level. This time I am going to use the actual American flag, but I am going to give a template. It's going to be black and white. The kids got to pick from both sides of their family, where did their family come from before the United States and use the colors from those countries on top of the American flag (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018).

Through the Flags of Diversity project, Mr. Nelson wanted students to develop an appreciation for the school's overall diversity and openly demonstrate pride in their own heritage. The Flags of Diversity also gave Mr. Nelson an opportunity to meet students early on in their Corby High School career, so he often already knew them when they enrolled in his art classes during tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade.

In addition to Flags of Diversity, Mr. Nelson had contributed to the Corby High School community in a variety of ways over his twenty-seven years there and at times he seemed to be everywhere on campus. When he began his career at Corby, he coached JV football for eight years until his own children got older, and he decided he needed to spend more time with them. After he stopped coaching, he stayed involved in the school community and established his presence beyond the art room through other activities, such as moderating the BSU, the art club, and the Ping Pong club, working the gates at football games, attending service trips, and chaperoning retreats (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). Mr. Nelson was never a quiet spectator during these activities instead, he was

always fully involved. He described how he enjoyed informally engaging with and entertaining the students and shared that at one retreat he had even shown up dressed in full costume as Lil' Wayne. When I asked him why he chose to partake in so many voluntary activities that were beyond the scope of his job description, he told me, "It's the relationship, showing them that somebody else cares. The kids, they want you there. They want certain teachers there" (Nelson Interview #2, 12/13/2018).

In addition to being present for or involved in multiple extracurricular activities, Mr. Nelson also frequently popped into other teachers' classes; he told me, "I love to visit other teachers' classrooms" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). He recounted one time when he was in the room of a young math teacher whose classroom he visited often:

> He [the other teacher] said, "Mr. Nelson, come draw something that's mathematical on the board." I put a slave ship up there on the whiteboard. Then I drew the cells and asked the kids, "What do you see?" They say, "A boat." I say, "What kind of boat?" Then they said, "Wait a minute." Then I draw a little Black person diving overboard, and I put a couple sharks in the water, and I put some red colors on it, and then somebody said, "It's the slaves jumping overboard. They didn't want to come here." I said, "There were a lot of slaves on that ship. When anyone got sick, they just threw them overboard" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018).

In moments like the one described above, Mr. Nelson not only got to share his artistic talents with students, but he also demonstrated his commitment to the students at Corby and to their development as thinkers who would critically reflect on the history of our country. Mr. Nelson also shared that he frequently liked to visit, "One of the classes we

have at Corby called the African American Experience. I'm not teaching it, but I might drop in and give my opinion on something" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). Mr. Nelson loved having these additional opportunities to engage with students in meaningful conversation, to add his two cents, and to push the students to think critically about the world.

Mr. Nelson's involvement in areas beyond the art room was meaningful to students and made them feel connected to him. James reflected,

> Mine and his relationship teacher student wise is much stronger than mine and another teacher's relationship, because I believe a good teacher is someone who creates a relationship with a student and is not just there for, like, one hour to just tell them information and then just not talk to him again (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019).

Even students who Mr. Nelson had never actually taught appreciated his presence at the school and their casual interactions with him. Roger had never had Mr. Nelson for a class, but he still described him as "a teacher that treats you like a son" (Roger Interview #2, 4/10/2019). In reference to the senior exit surveys, Mr. Nelson told me, "Every year I am shocked and stunned**.** I would say a good fourth of those [students] that comment on me I never had in class. They know me from either retreats or just me messing with them in the hallways" (Mr. Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). For students, Mr. Nelson's presence and recognition of them was meaningful – they seemed not to require any grand gestures rather they simply appreciated someone who consistently showed up.

The impact of his presence and its importance to students was perhaps most profoundly summed up by Germaine, who stated,

> Aside from the school mascot, I assume that a silhouette of Nelson would be the mascot of the school or at least Nelson riding the mascot or something like that. But he's definitely a trademark or a key point in the experience here. I think without him there'd definitely be something missing (Germaine Interview #1, 2/13/2019).

Through his involvement in many activities outside the classroom, Mr. Nelson demonstrated his investment in students as people. It also helped him to initiate relationships with students before they even enrolled in his class and thus to more quickly engage in a productive learning relationships when they did become his art students. Additionally, as one of the few Black male teachers at Corby, his participation in school wide activities allowed him to form meaningful relationships with those students he did not teach and to serve as a source of support for all the Black male students at the school regardless of whether or not they had him as a teacher.

Practice #5: Preparing students for short and long-term success.

"He holds us to a higher standard." - Darius

As has been established, Mr. Nelson believed his art class was as much a class about life as it was a class about art. Therefore, he believed he needed to prepare his Black male students not only to be good artists and strong students, but that he also needed to prepare them for life. Therefore, he held his students to high standards both in terms of the work they produced and in terms of the way they behaved and represented themselves.

While Mr. Nelson was frequently described as approachable and personable, his students also indicated that he was not permissive. He wanted students to feel

comfortable in his class, but he also wanted them to take accountability for their actions and to recognize how to comport themselves in different situations. He explained, "I'm trying to tell them about we can have a good time, but there is a line that you can't cross" (Nelson Interview #2, 12/13/2018). He expanded, telling me he had let the students know that he would snitch if needed, especially if he felt it was in the student's long term best interest. He emphasized that this was not an idle threat and recounted how when his nephew was a student at Corby, he turned him in for violating a school rule, "because I wanted to send a message" (Nelson Interview #3, 3/15/2019). He believed students needed to take ownership and responsibility for their actions and learn to consider the possible repercussions of their decisions before they made them. He often used his own life experiences to warn students about the possible consequences of bad decisions. Calvin stated,

> He always has a new life experience for us. Maybe we were thinking about doing this and he said, "Okay, well, when you do this, I want you to think about what is going to happen. I want you to think about maybe the possibility of this happening or the possibility of that happening" (Calvin Interview #2, 4/20/2019).

Sometimes he helped students to think more deeply about decisions, by simply offering them hypothetical situations to ponder. During one classroom observation, I noted,

> "As the students draw, Mr. Nelson poses a question to them, "You go to the ATM, and you find $500, would you turn the money in? The students debate the problem. Mr. Nelson doesn't offer a definitive answer. He just presents different points of view on the situation; he wants the students to think (Observation Field Notes 2/13/2019).

Mr. Nelson saw developing the students' critical thinking skills as an important part of preparing them for the future.

In addition to trying to get students to think critically and carefully consider their choices, Mr. Nelson also made sure not to turn a blind eye towards students' bad decisions because he wanted them to know he expected more of them. Mr. Nelson hoped that all his students would come to understand the importance of making smart decisions, but this lesson appeared to be particularly salient for his Black male students, who at times believed they may face more severe consequences for their violations of school rules. Darius voiced this sentiment when he described,

> He [Mr. Nelson] holds us [Black students] to a higher standard. Not to the point where we collapse under the pressure, but he sees us playing around or doing dumb stuff, he'll pull us aside and say, "this is what they want you to do so they can kick you out" (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

He hoped the students would recognize that as Black male youth their behaviors would at times be judged differently and presumably more harshly than their White peers, and they needed to recognize this reality and adjust their behavior accordingly for their own benefit. Consequently, Mr. Nelson had no qualms about confronting and calling out students when they did things that could be harmful to themselves or to others or that were just plain stupid. He described that in the past, "He [James] has done some stuff that he shouldn't have, and I called him on it" (Nelson Interview #2, 12/13/2018). Mr. Nelson believed that letting students, particularly his Black male students, get one over ultimately set them up for more harm in the future. It was better for them to learn a lesson from him when the stakes were lower than to face more drastic consequence in the future.

In this way Mr. Nelson demonstrated a politicized care for his Black male students by communicating that he had their long term interest at heart.

His high standards for students extended beyond their decision-making and comportment to the work they produced in art class. Mr. Nelson had great passion for both art and learning. He consistently worked to keep his own skills sharp, so he could best support his students. He shared, "One of the great things about Corby has been that they support us to do academic teacher development. I've done six years at Savannah College of Art & Design, Columbia University, the Chicago Art Institute…" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). Mr. Nelson was committed to his craft and continued to improve it, and he expected the same from his students. While all the focal students described art as a more laid-back class, they still knew that Mr. Nelson expected them to be productive in class, to produce their best work, and to follow directions and respond to feedback.

Each time I observed the art room, students were immersed in conversation with Mr. Nelson or with one another or they were listening to music, but for the most part, they were also diligently working on their art pieces. I noticed, "There is a casual but not carefree atmosphere in the classroom. There is a low murmur of chatter, but students work" (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/13/2018). Mr. Nelson recognized that not every student would have a passion for art or a future career in an art field, but he did require that all students put forth their best effort and attempt the techniques he demonstrated. Darius stated, "If it's bad, he'll make you start over" (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019). James agreed, "He knows your level…so if he knows you did bad work, he'll tell you...or if he sees you're kind of lacking in production of your work, he'll let you know that…It's

really holding you accountable for your work" (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019). During one observation, I witnessed Mr. Nelson enforce the policy that each student put forth their best effort. As Mr. Nelson circulated the room and checked in with students, he went over to one student who had been distractedly trying to draw while also keeping an eye on a video on his phone. Mr. Nelson recognized that what the student had drawn in this half-attentive state was a pathetic representation of what he was actually capable of, so Mr. Nelson took the student's paper, ripped it up, and instructed the student to re-start. He did this calmly, matter of factly; he did not create a scene or draw attention to his actions; the student took the correction in stride perhaps recognizing that Mr. Nelson's assessment of his work was accurate – it was not his best effort. The student retrieved a new piece of paper and began again (Observation #3 Field Notes, 2/13/2019).

Mr. Nelson wanted all his students to produce their best work, but he set the highest standards for those students who had the most natural talent. He admitted, "I tell them if you're good, I'm going to be tough on you because I want the best for you" (Nelson Interview #1, 9/29/2018). Mr. Nelson acknowledged that both Germaine and James had natural talent, so he wanted to push them. Referring to Germaine, Mr. Nelson recounted, "When he was in fundamentals [of art], I recommended to him to take the drawing class because I saw his natural ability, and I wanted to push him" (Nelson Interview #2, 12/13/2018). He also wanted to push James not just to develop his craft but also to take it more seriously. James explained that Mr. Nelson would not allow him to take advanced art his junior year because James had not yet demonstrated his drive and commitment: "I think he didn't really see that I was really passionate about art. I think as our junior year went by he saw that, yes, I'm actually serious about this thing" (James

Interview #2, 4/24/2019). Once James demonstrated a greater level of seriousness concerning the development of his craft, Mr. Nelson allowed him to take the class his senior year. In reference to James, Mr. Nelson confided, "Skill-wise, he's wonderful. I wouldn't say he's in the top five of the students I have had, but I put him in my top ten of my career here. It's a natural skill, and I haven't told him that" (Nelson Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Mr. Nelson did not want to inflate James's ego as he thought that such praise would distract James from putting in the effort he needed to really become excellent, and Mr. Nelson's goal was to help those with a gift and the drive to become truly excellent.

By expecting the best from his students and providing the push and support needed for them to work towards their long term goals and potential, Mr. Nelson demonstrated a praxis of politicized care for his students that allowed him to both forge and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with them.

Practice #6: Engaging students as active participants in their own learning

"He doesn't really try to change your style, he tries to enhance it." - James

As has been previously described, the atmosphere in Mr. Nelson's room was more relaxed than in most other classes, and this atmosphere was in part due to Mr. Nelson's pedagogical approach. He never just stood in the front of the classroom and told the students what they should do; there was in fact no clear front of the room, no board, no teacher desk. Instead, as students worked, Mr. Nelson walked among them peering over their shoulders to check their progress and observe their process. He stopped from time to time to consult with a student or to point out something that needed to be re-done or made more precise. He looked over one student's shoulder and told him, "Do all the shapes and shadows first – you should do the face last." To another he instructed him to

take out his phone, take a picture of the object he was attempting to draw, and then Zoom in to observe the details – "look at the bones – you want to put in the crevice – do you see what I am talking about?" He moved to Germaine, watched him at work for a moment, and then told him "You don't have enough shine. Just pick some spots so it will look 3D." He picked up a pencil and demonstrated how to accomplish the shine spot (Observation #1 Field Notes, 12/13/2018).

During another class, as he walked around the room and observed the students at work, he paused the entire class to note a common mistake students were making and to clarify the technique, "Listen up when you start the cube start in the left hand side of the box. If you need a demo again, come here." A group of four or five students gathered around to watch the demo; this same sequence of events occurred multiple times throughout the period (Observation #3 Field Notes, 2/13/2019). It was how he taught - direct, hands-on, modeling, demonstrating, working amongst the student. As Darius described,

> He really does not talk at you. I don't even know if teaching is the right word. Even though he does teach, I guess it's like guiding your hand and then letting go and letting you go on you own. Then he looks at what you created and he'll either talk you up or talk you down (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

James added to this notion when I asked him if Mr. Nelson had had an impact on his style as an artist, he told me, "He doesn't really try to change your style, he tries to enhance it" (James Interview #1, 3/8/2019). As a student in advanced art, James saw Mr. Nelson as more of a consultant than an instructor. Mr. Nelson was not trying to change James's unique stamp as an artist but rather he wanted to work with it to help make it better. In

this way, Mr. Nelson became a partner in the work rather than a driving force, which allowed the students, especially those in the higher level art classes, to direct their own learning and display their personal style. This approach was particularly impactful for students like James for whom art may lead to future opportunity.

As Mr. Nelson evaluated the students' artwork, he was not afraid to give constructive critique that would push his students to improve. James described,

> He's really honest with you and that's what I like. And that's why it's a positive impact. He'll tell you if it's not good, or he'll tell you if this needs work or if that needs work or something else, so it's definitely been positive (James, Interview #1, 2019).

By using his knowledge and experience as an artist to support James's drive and enhance his skills, Mr. Nelson maintained a productive working relationship with James because James saw his interactions with Mr. Nelson as valuable contributions to his development as an artist. In general, students viewed Mr. Nelson as someone who in his instruction prioritized showing rather than telling; Mr. Nelson worked alongside his students and participated in the artistic process with them rather than simply telling them what to do and expecting them to do it. When I observed his classes, Mr. Nelson was always on his feet – observing, consulting, critiquing, suggesting. Mr. Nelson's hands-on approach to teaching helped to strengthen his relationship with students because he collaborated with them and clearly modeled what they needed to do to be successful in his class.

Mr. Nelson had productive relationships with all his students, but his presence at Corby appeared to be especially meaningful to his Black male students. His transparency with his students, his willingness to mentor students and provide them with life advice,

the humanizing manner in which he interacted with students, the way he engaged with students in learning and prepared them for the future, and his active involvement in the school community all helped him to connect with his students in a meaningful way.

The manner in which he enacted these practices and engaged with his Black male students was impacted by his personal identity as a Black man as well as by his life experience and role at Corby. In the next section I outline the findings for Mr. Nelson that pertain to research question two: *How does a teacher's identity – particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role – influence the way they initiate and maintain productive student teacher relationships with their Black male students?*

Influence of dimensions of identity on relational practices.

Mr. Nelson's positionality as both a Black man and as an art teacher had a strong positive influence on his ability to form productive relationships with his Black male students.

Race & gender. For Mr. Nelson, I have chosen to address both race and gender together because the intersectionality of these two dimensions of identities rather than either dimension alone strongly influenced Mr. Nelson's ability to identify with his Black male students and for his Black male students to identify with him. Many of the Black male students I interviewed appreciated being able to hear about Mr. Nelson's life because they believed that many of his life experiences were similar to their own, and therefore they could relate to and learn from his stories. Germaine explained,

> I think that having a teacher, an educator, someone that is imparting something from them on to you is a transaction that I think a lot of people value. Especially, if he's also Black, you kind of-- Even though it shouldn't necessarily be that

> different but it's definitely a part of a club that you wouldn't have with a White teacher (Germaine Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

While Mr. Nelson was not the only Black male teacher at the school, he was the only Black male teacher Germaine had had for class during his time at Corby, and thus, Mr. Nelson, perhaps held greater significance for Germaine because he was one of the few teachers at the school who shared a similar racial and gender identity.

Mr. Nelson himself felt that he did not necessarily give preference to his Black male students, but his Black male students definitely felt that he showed a greater level of understanding and concern for them than did many of their other teachers, and they often partially equated this to his race and gender. Darius expressed this sentiment when he described that Mr. Nelson "guides the Black students in the school" (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019). Mr. Nelson's shared racial and gender experiences coupled with his openness and willingness to discuss race with his students empowered his Black male student to address real racial concerns with him. Germaine reflected,

> You'll be able to relate more personally to a Black teacher. Things you can't discuss racially or just wouldn't seem right if you're talking to a White teacher one-on-one. It's like the freedom I mentioned earlier – where you wouldn't expect the outlandish response from a teacher that looks like you (Germaine Interview #2, 4/9/2019).

Some of the racialized topics students discussed with Mr. Nelson included dealing with the police, how to navigate inter-racial relationships, or how to respond when a White person either used or called you the N word. Germaine provided an overview of the types of conversations that they commonly had in BSU: "We talk about a lot of issues or why

things are happening or the underlying colorism and racism that is happening stuff like that. That conversation just doesn't happen with any other teacher" (Germaine Interview #1, 2/13/2019).

Mr. Nelson's Black male students felt comfortable broaching these topics with him, and they also felt more comfortable and less on edge in Mr. Nelson's classroom than they did in many other spaces in the school because they felt Mr. Nelson was more accepting of their cultural forms of expression. In reference to the energy in Mr. Nelson's classroom, Germaine told me, "It's very different; it's kind of like the bridge between the other faculty" (Germaine Interview #1, 2/13/2019). Mr. Nelson also used his art class as a platform to help his Black male students learn their history, grapple with current issues, and embrace their Blackness.

Yet while his identity as a Black man mattered, Germaine expressed that what Mr. Nelson meant to students went far beyond his shared race and gender:

> And I think Mr. Nelson - his old wisdom or Black manness is a niche that can't just be filled – Mr. Barnes he's Black, but he's not old. It doesn't have the kind of, like the life strength around - life experience that Mr. Nelson would have or kind of the way that his vibe kind of comes into the conversation how it applies to the school. So I think that, yeah, Mr. Nelson would be irreplaceable, honestly, I think. You can't just bring someone else in (Germaine, Interview #1, 3/8/2019).

Germaine thus indicated that while Mr. Nelson's attributes as a Black man definitely helped Germaine feel more connected to Mr. Nelson than he did to some of his White teachers, not every Black man could fill the role of Mr. Nelson or could instantly relate to their Black males students. Germaine recognized Mr. Nelson's ability to connect with

students went significantly beyond a shared race and gender and had more to do with the way he enacted a praxis of politicized care for his students which acknowledged, confronted, and helped students navigate their daily realities as Black male adolescents in America.

Life experience. As described in the previous section, Mr. Nelson's lived experiences as a Black man, definitely impacted his empathy and cultural awareness in interactions with his students. Mr. Nelson like many of his Black male students had grown up in the area around Corby and like his students he had to navigate being in a diverse school space. Thus, Mr. Nelson understood the importance of developing his students' cultural competence especially since many of his Black male students were coming from schools that were predominately Black and had not had many previous sustained interactions with White people. Mr. Nelson also had insight into his students' experience at Corby both because he had taught there for so many years and because his son and nephew had both attended the school. Thus, he not only had a sense of what it meant for Black male adolescents to navigate diverse spaces but also had a specific awareness of what that experience was like at Corby High School. Additionally, Mr. Nelson's own schooling experience in elementary school where he struggled to find his place in school made him ever vigilant of looking out for and trying to help students who may feel like they did not fit in. Finally, Mr. Nelson's educational background and prior work experience prepared him as a knowledgeable expert in the field. In addition to his twenty-seven years of experience in the classroom, he had both a degree in art and a degree in education; in addition, he continued to regularly attend professional development to make himself a stronger educator.

Institutional role. Mr. Nelson's position as an art teacher also influenced the manner in which he initiated and maintained relationships with his students. In reference to his co-moderator of the BSU, Mr. Nelson told me, "I got a lot more freedom. He's teaching history so he has to – you can't freestyle like I do" (Nelson Interview #3, 3/15/2019). Mr. Nelson realized that because art was a more creative pursuit, it allowed him to honor effort and growth over mastery in a way that was not always possible for his colleagues in other subject areas. For the students, the more informal atmosphere in Mr. Nelson's art class provided a reprieve from the pressures that inundated them throughout the rest of the day. Brandon explained,

> As long as you try, you're going to get a decent grade. You don't really have to stress about that and that's outside of class too, you see him in the hallway, because you don't have the stress of class, failing a test just last period, you'd see him, and you chill with him (Brandon Interview #1, 1/24/2019).

As Brandon pointed out, since there are "no wrong answers in art," students did not see it as a class where they had to stress about whether or not they would be judged competent by the teacher. Due to this less high stakes environment, students rarely experienced tension in their relationship with Mr. Nelson. As a result, students felt less animosity toward Mr. Nelson than they might have felt towards some of their other teachers, and they also felt more comfortable in their interactions with Mr. Nelson.

Additionally, as Germaine explained, "you can draw and talk at the same time" (Germaine Interview #1, 2/13/2019). In Mr. Nelson's class conversations about life did not interrupt students' productivity in the same way it might in a class where students needed their full concentration to read, write, or work through a math problem. In art

class, it was possible for Mr. Nelson to embrace teachable moments without derailing the lesson, which allowed him the freedom to have meaningful conversations with students that built a foundation for a productive student-teacher relationship.

Overall, the internal, external, and organization dimension of his identity as a Black male art teacher served to help Mr. Nelson to both initiate and maintain productive relationships with his Black male students.

Cross-Case Analysis

When I conducted the cross-case analysis, all three focal teacher used four practices to initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students: 1) interacting with students in a humanizing manner, 2) engaging in conversations about race with students, 3) engaging students as active participants in their own learning, and 4) preparing students for short and long-term success. Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass also both adopted a fifth common practice: being consistently present in students' school lives. Yet the ways the focal teachers approached each of these practices varied from teacher to teacher, and many times this variance was in part due to different dimensions of the teacher's identity – race, gender, life experience, and/or role.

In this section, I first describe the five practices that the teachers shared (four shared by all teachers, one shared by Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass). I then explain the practices that were unique to each individual teacher. For each of the common and unique practices, I summarize the practice and then describe how specific dimensions of the teachers' identities influenced the manner in which they approached the practice. I conclude the section with an overall summary of how each dimension of identity – race, gender, life experience, and role – influenced the way the teachers initiated and maintained relationships with their Black male students.

Common practice # 1: Interacting with students in a humanizing manner.

Each of the focal teachers prioritized getting to know their students as people and interacting with them in a way that positively acknowledged their presence and their humanity. They all recognized that their students craved attention and wanted to be acknowledged and affirmed, so they provided proactive positive attention. The teachers consistently acknowledged their students through simple gestures such as saying hello in the hallway, greeting students with a smile and genuine gladness to see them, or joking with students as they entered the room. These small acts of recognition sent students the message that their presence mattered to the teacher and were an important aspect of how the teachers embodied a praxis of politicized care for their students.

Additionally, all three focal teachers validated their students by recognizing their students' capacities and working with students to cultivate their talents. Mrs. Compass helped build students' self-confidence and academic competence. When working with students one-on-one, she first attempted to uncover what a student knew and could do and then used that prior knowledge as a starting point for helping the student to grasp a new concept. She also recognized students' effort as an important asset, which signified their desire to improve, and made sure to honor that effort by noticing and naming areas where students had made growth. By focusing on the knowledge, skills, and mindsets students brought with them to academic support, Mrs. Compass acknowledged students' areas of competence and the talents they already possessed. Mr. Fitzgerald also sought to uncover and recognize what students could do rather than focusing in on the skills they lacked. He focused his energy on curating students' intellectual curiosity rather than simply ensuring they could produce correct answers. He explained, "I think I'd rather

have a student who was inconsistent with homework assignments, and yet has these moments of interest, engagement, and passion in the course, then someone that completes things because he needs to check the box" (Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018). Mr. Fitzgerald saw students' effort, passion, and curiosity as assets that he could leverage to promote student learning, and like Mrs. Compass, he valued and honored these contributions that his students brought to the classroom. In his art classes, Mr. Nelson also looked to discover what a student could do and then to help them develop from there. He wanted to promote students' creativity, so he worked with their artistic styles and helped them build upon those styles to make them even better. By recognizing students' prior knowledge and abilities as a starting point for learning, the focal teachers were able to build productive relationship with their Black male students because they affirmed the students' inherent worth, knowledge, and competence.

All three focal teachers also interacted with their students in a humanizing way by communicating that they valued them as human beings. The focal teachers made a deliberate effort to discover individual students' interests and passions, so they could get to know their students on a more personal level. Corby High School has a reputation as an athletic powerhouse where many Black male students are exalted for their athletic prowess, yet the focal teachers recognized that their Black male students brought much more to the school community than just their athletic talents. They wanted all their Black male students to feel valued whether or not they were athletes, and they wanted those students who were athletes to be recognized for more than just their athletic abilities. Accordingly, the focal teachers displayed an interest in their Black male students' numerous talents: academic, artistic, dramatic, musical, etc., worked with their students

to cultivate those talents, and celebrated their students' successes in each of these areas. Through their blatant interest in their students' holistic identities, the focal teachers conveyed to their Black male students that the teachers believed they had a lot of potential and that they could be successful in variety of different arenas.

In addition to acknowledging and supporting their students' multiple areas of talent, the focal teachers also humanized their students by soliciting and honoring their Black male students' voices and opinions within the classroom. Mr. Nelson used his class as a place to engage students in open discussion about issues that were important to them. Mr. Fitzgerald ensured that every student had an opportunity to speak every class and that students had frequent opportunities to offer their opinions and discuss or debate issues that were relevant to them. Mrs. Compass often engaged in one-on-one conversations with students around personal issues, and she also listened to students and let them voice without shame areas where they were academically struggling and needed help. By creating instructional spaces, where students could speak freely or openly admit their areas of weakness, the focal teachers implemented open communication in the classroom, one of the key components of politicized care. This open communication then helped the teachers to strengthen their relationships with their Black male students because they demonstrated to their students that they were invested and interested in them as individuals.

The focal teachers also demonstrated politicized care for their Black male students because they did not ignore their Blackness. Rather than adopt a colorblind ideology, they recognized that students' experiences are both positively and negatively impacted by their race and gender, and in acknowledging this, the teachers more fully recognized their

students' humanity. Through their insistence on getting to know students and seeing them as individuals rather than making assumptions about them based on stereotypical portrayals of Black male adolescents, all three teachers opened the door for productive relationships with their Black male students.

Influence of dimensions of identity. The way teachers interacted with students in a humanizing manner was influenced primarily by their life experience and instructional roles. Through their education, prior work experience, and prior life experiences all three teachers realized that to fully recognize their Black male students' humanity they had to acknowledge their racial identity rather than adopt a color-blind approach. Each teacher's ability to see race as an important aspect of their students' identity was influenced by their previous life experience: Mr. Nelson's lived experience as a Black man, Mrs. Compass's experience growing up with a Black brother and raising Black sons, and Mr. Fitzgerald's thirteen years of experience working with Black male students.

Additionally, teachers' institutional role also influenced the manner by which they interacted with students in a way that honored their humanity. Given his role as an English teacher who had to ensure students mastered certain material throughout the course of the year, Mr. Fitzgerald had fewer opportunities to get to know students through casual classroom conversations or through one-on-one interactions. Consequently, he had to find ways to get to know students, to cultivate their talent, and to honor their voices and experiences through the curriculum. He created these opportunities by designing a curriculum that included assignments such as the personal narrative, classroom structures such as the independent reading program, classroom materials that included culturally relevant texts, and interactive classroom activities such as debates.

His intentionally designed curriculum allowed him to cover necessary content while also gaining insight into his students, their interest, and their lives outside of class. Mr. Nelson's and Mrs. Compass's roles provided more flexible classroom structures that allowed them to learn about their students, honor their voices, and recognize their multiple talents. Because of the more informal structure within the academic support room and the art building, Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass had more opportunity to engage in casual conversations with students that focused on issues that mattered to their students and to have more frequent one-on-one conversations with students.

Finally, for Mr. Nelson, race also influenced the way he interacted with students in a humanizing manner. Unlike, Mr. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Compass, Mr. Nelson shared a similar racial and cultural background with many of his Black male students, so within his classroom he often used modes of communication that were familiar to his Black male students. By engaging and speaking with students in a manner that was similar to how his Black male students talked to their family and friends, Mr. Nelson created a space in the art room where his Black male students felt they could be accepted as their authentic selves.

Common practice #2: Engaging in conversations about race with students.

All three focal teachers did not shy away from or gloss over the issue of race in their conversations with their Black male students. They all displayed an awareness of the impact racism could have on their Black male students both at Corby and in the larger world, and demonstrated a sincere empathy and concern for their students' physical and psychological well-being. Because the teachers treated students' concerns as valid and addressed conversations around race with understanding and respect, their Black male

students felt comfortable engaging in race-based discussions in the classroom. Each teacher enacted a praxis of politicized care in their classrooms where they acknowledged that race mattered and engaged with students in open and honest conversations about race rather than taking a color-blind approach and treating the topic of race as taboo. Through their actions, the focal teachers demonstrated their politicized care for their Black male students and strengthened their relationships with them by asserting that they saw their students and acknowledged their realities.

Influence of dimensions of identity. The way teachers approached and engaged in conversations about race was influenced by their life experiences and roles as well as by their own racial identity. Each teacher had developed an empathetic regard for Black male students through their own unique life experiences; however the depth of understanding varied based on each teacher's individual experience. Additionally, how and when teachers chose to engage in discussions about race appeared to vary based on their own race and their institutional role.

Mr. Fitzgerald developed an understanding of his Black male students' realities through his experience teaching Black male adolescents at Corby over the past thirteen years, as well through his intellectual curiosity and extensive reading of books written by authors whose racial and cultural backgrounds, perspectives, or life experiences were different from his own. Mr. Fitzgerald's identity as a White man, his more intellectual understanding of Black male students' experiences, and his role as an English teacher all influenced how he engaged in conversations about race. Given his identity as a White man, Mr. Fitzgerald used small gestures to try and communicate that he was open to engaging in critical conversations about race and oppression. For example, he had up on

his classroom wall several quotes from Ta-Nehisi Coates in which Coates problematizes the traditional Eurocentric conception of some well-known historical events. Additionally, as an English teacher, he often segued into conversations about race and racism through the words of authors of color. He purposefully structured his curriculum around texts that addressed and often problematized issues of race and oppression, and used this content as a vehicle to talk about the race-based issues in the text that students could potentially relate to.

Furthermore, he acknowledged his Black male students' desire to talk about events that were important to them and made space for those conversations in his lessons, which is evident in how he structured a lesson around the actions of the Covington High students after Calvin expressed an interest in the issue. Overall, while Mr. Fitzgerald openly encouraged conversations about race, given his Whiteness, his life experience, and his role as an English teacher, he seemed to feel most confident facilitating intellectual conversations about race where student could share their own experiences through the lens of the curricular content.

Mrs. Compass developed her understanding of Black male adolescents' realities and experiences with racism through the vicarious and proximal experiences she had growing up alongside a Black brother and raising Black sons. Through the discrimination she witnessed when she was with them as well as through the accounts they relayed to her, she had a keen sense of how Black male youth are often treated within our society.

Although Mrs. Compass was always very vocal during her interviews about how she recognized the prominent role that racism and oppression played in her students' lives, she did not appear to engage in conversation about race-based issues with students

as frequently as Mr. Fitzgerald and Mr. Nelson did. This may be in part due to the fact that in her role as the co-director of academic support her main priority was supporting students on whatever work they brought to her. This structure did not as naturally lead to sustained curricular conversations around race in the same way it did for Mr. Fitzgerald, nor did her position as a White woman incline most students to raise these concerns with her in the same way they did with Mr. Nelson. Despite the fact that these conversations may not have been as common in the academic support space, Mrs. Compass was not afraid to name racism or engage her students in conversations about race. However, she was often the one in the relationship to initiate these conversations as evidenced in her conversation with Malcolm about her concerns for him next year when he would attend school and play college football in the South. As in the example with Malcolm, Mrs. Compass seemed to approach conversations around race and racism from a lens of motherly concern that stemmed from her experiences with her own Black sons. In these conversations, she usually expressed her worries for her Black male students' physical safety and psychological well-being.

Mr. Nelson deeply understood the racism faced by his students because of his lived experience as a Black man. Thus, Mr. Nelson was able to identify a broader range of raced-based issues that might be of concern to his Black male students: police brutality, inter-racial relationships, codeswitching, and the impact of micro-aggression and outright discrimination on one's dignity. As a Black man, Mr. Nelson did not feel the need to segue into the topic of race or be selective about which students could handle these types of conversation with him, he felt confident and prepared to engage in race-based conversations with all his students. His position as a co-moderator of the BSU also

provided him with a built-in structure where he could have straightforward conversations with students about race and oppression. Additionally, the looser structure of his art class created plenty of space for these conversations. Mr. Nelson's overall candor and transparency about his experiences as a Black man made his students feel as if he knew what they were going through, and thus he and his Black male students were able to have a back and forth dialogue on race without his students fearing that Mr. Nelson would respond in judgment or ignorance as might be the case with a White teacher.

The topics of racial identity and racism were commonplace in Mr. Nelson's classroom, and questions and concerns about these topics were posed by both Mr. Nelson and his students. As he addressed these topics, Mr. Nelson communicated to students that they were not alone in these feelings and experiences, and he also provided them with useful advice on how to navigate issues of racism both at Corby and outside of school. Thus, for Mr. Nelson his race, gender, life experience, and his role as a teacher in a more loosely structured class all helped facilitate his ability to engage his students in meaningful conversations about race.

Common practice #3: Engaging students as active participants in their own learning.

All three focal teachers recognized that learning is not something that happens to someone; it is something that happens with someone. Given this understanding, they positioned themselves as co-learners and worked alongside their students. Both Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass used the physical set up of their classrooms to demonstrate their commitment to establishing a collaborative relationship with their students. In their

instructional spaces, there was no identifiable front of the classroom or a prominent teacher desk. Instead their rooms were structured as shared work spaces.

Additionally, all three teachers displayed a sense of politicized care for their students by providing them with the support and encouragement needed to work to their fullest potential. They did this by making time to work collaboratively with individual students, so they could address students' individual needs. Mr. Nelson's pedagogical approach was based on modeling, observing, providing feedback, and re-modeling when necessary. He frequently demonstrated a skill or technique for one individual student, and then observed and guided that student as the student tried to replicate it.

Given her role as the co-director of academic support, Mrs. Compass almost always worked with students one-on-one. When she worked with students, she never simply gave them information but instead guided them through a process or had them explain their thinking to her. She frequently read with students to support their comprehension or worked with them, step-by- step, through a math problem. She did not do the work for the student or tell them exactly what needed to be done, but instead worked alongside them, first determining what a student knew and could do, then explaining an idea or process to them, before guiding them through the application.

Mr. Fitzgerald's pedagogical approach was at times more teacher-led than Mr. Nelson's and Mrs. Compass's approaches, but he also frequently found opportunities to work alongside individual students. For example, when his students were working on writing assignments, he would sit down with individual students, and he and the student would read their drafts and make revisions together.

Additionally, both Mr. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Compass engaged students in the learning process by grounding their instruction in inquiry. Rather than telling students what they needed to know, they would develop student learning through questioning thus inviting students to actively participate in the process of knowledge creation. Furthermore, Mr. Fitzgerald engaged his students through the curricular material he chose; he made sure that the material was culturally relevant, so students could relate to the characters in the novels they read and therefore make stronger inferences about the characters' experiences.

Finally, all three focal teachers regularly displayed their own love of learning: Mr. Fitzgerald passionately discussed books; Mr. Nelson hung his own art throughout the art room; and Mrs. Compass showed genuine curiosity for the content students were working on in their different classes. Through these actions, the focal teachers modeled for their students what it means to be a self-propelled life-long learner.

The focal teachers' strengthened their relationship with their Black male students through their willingness to work alongside their students and to include them as partners in the learning process. As a result, the students felt a connection to both the teacher and the content and came to see their teachers as knowledgeable experts who could help them work towards their goals.

Influence of dimensions of identity. Teachers' identity seemed to have less influence on how they approached working with students to engage them as active participants in their own learning than it did on some of their other practices; however their instructional role, and their race in some cases did seem to slightly influence their approaches.

The focal teachers' instructional roles influenced the ways they were able to engage students in co-learning relationships. Because Mrs. Compass primarily worked with students in a one-on-one capacity, it was easy for her to work alongside individual students. Since Mr. Fitzgerald taught a larger class, he had less time to work alongside individual students. Thus, he had to find ways to collectively engage his students in the instruction, which he did through the use of culturally relevant material and inquiry based instruction. For Mr. Nelson, he often had the opportunity to model and guide individual students since most of his class time was focused on the "doing" of art rather than direct instruction.

Finally, for Mr. Fitzgerald in particular, his awareness of his racial position in the classroom informed, at least to some extent, his decision to establish himself as a co-learner, who could learn with and from his students. Mr. Fitzgerald reflected that, as a White man .when they read books that dealt with issues of racial identity or racism, he never wanted to tell a student how to interpret or feel about something. By making his class more discussion- and inquiry-based, everyone in the room became a source of knowledge and expertise rather than Mr. Fitzgerald being the only source of truth. By taking a stance of vulnerability where he was willing to listen and learn from his students in a collaborative classroom learning community, Mr. Fitzgerald demonstrated a praxis of politicized care as he sought to lessen the sense of a power dynamic in the classroom, which appeared to be especially important for a White male teacher when interacting with his Black male students.

Common practice # 4: Preparing students for short and long-term success.

All of the focal teachers were committed to helping their students develop as both students and people. They wanted their students to be successful while they were at Corby and to be prepared for the future. Therefore, the focal teachers placed an emphasis on working with students to develop the content knowledge, academic habits, life skills, and mindsets necessary to succeed both at and beyond Corby. This focus on students' future success was one of the primary ways all of the teachers demonstrated politicized care for their students.

To support their students' academic development, all three focal teachers combined high expectations with the support needed for students to meet those expectations. They expected students to re-work assignments that were subpar, persist through work that was challenging and not give up, think critically and respond to constructive critique, practice something until they got it right, and maintain a high level of academic integrity. The teachers then supported their students in meeting these expectations by providing individualized support that acknowledged the strengths and weaknesses of each student.

Focal teachers demonstrated commitment to their students by first investing in their own intellectual and professional development. They continually worked to deepen their own knowledge, so they would have the subject matter mastery and pedagogical maneuvers needed to provide a high level of support for their students. They were frequently available outside of class time to provide extra support for students and were adept at providing individualized and tailored feedback. In their feedback, they not only noted areas for improvement but also provided clear steps, explanations, and models of how students could make those improvements. The teachers' support was evident in how

Mr. Nelson gave students specific advice to improve a piece of art such as "it needs more shine," how Mrs. Compass patiently and repeatedly walked a student through a process until they could do it without guidance, and how Mr. Fitzgerald asked pointed questions to help students critically analyze a text.

The focal teachers not only helped their students achieve academic success in their classes at Corby, but they also helped their students develop life-long skills that would benefit them both in college and in life. For instance, through the independent reading program, Mr. Fitzgerald hoped his students would develop a personal reading life, so they could become life-long self-directed learners. In academic support, Mrs. Compass helped students to acquire study and time management skills. Additionally, through her one-on-one work with students, Mrs. Compass encouraged students to develop growth mindsets, self-advocacy skills, and positive self-perceptions that were tied to inner accomplishment rather than external recognition. Mr. Nelson supported students' personal development by sharing his reflections on the mistakes he had made in his life and the lessons he had learned in hopes his students could learn from his experiences. He also pushed students to think critically and to make informed decisions.

The teachers maintained productive relationship with their Black male students because they demonstrated their investment in their Black male students' futures and provided them with the skills they would need to be successful. As such, the relationships served a purpose beyond just an interpersonal connection.

Influence of dimensions of identity. The manner in which all three teachers tried to prepare their students for the future was influenced by their life experiences and

institutional roles. Additionally Mr. Nelson's race and gender also affected the specific approach he took to preparing his Black male students for the future.

All three teachers' life experiences such as their educational backgrounds, continued professional development, and years of experience in the classroom were important aspects that influenced their sense of self-efficacy and prepared them with the knowledge needed to prepare their students for success. The teachers were able to maintain high expectations for their students because their prior experience made them confident that they had the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively support their Black male students in meeting those expectations.

Additionally, their roles also affected how they approached the preparation of their students for the future. Mr. Fitzgerald primarily focused on students' overall academic preparation. As an English teacher, it was essential that he deepen his students' reading, writing, and critical thinking skills because regardless of the fields his students would go into, these were necessary skills that they would need to be successful. Mr. Nelson supported and pushed his students who planned to go on and pursue artistic endeavors, but he also recognized that many of his students would not necessarily pursue art after his class. Therefore he put a greater focus on preparing his students for life, which was made possible by the more informal and casual structure of his art class. Finally, due to her role as the co-director of academic support, Mrs. Compass primarily focused on helping students to attain short-term academic success that could then be transformed into more long-term success. Additionally, since she often worked one-on-one with students, she was able to meet the needs of individual students, so she could help them to be successful both at Corby and at the next level.

Finally, Mr. Nelson's race and gender influenced his ability to prepare his Black male students to navigate the world as Black men. Because Mr. Nelson shared the same race and gender, he was able to share his own experiences and to provide insight on the obstacles his students might encounter as Black men and give them informed advice on how they could successfully approach these situations. His personal knowledge of the challenges they might encounter as Black men gave him a level of insight into his students' needs for the future that teachers of other races and genders could not share.

Common practice #5: Being consistently present in students' school lives.

Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass successfully maintained productive relationships with Black male students because for many students, they were a consistent presence throughout their years at Corby. Both Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass were actively engaged in the Corby community. Mr. Nelson regularly facilitated or moderated extracurricular activities: he moderated the BSU, attended the student retreats, and worked the gate at football games. While Mrs. Compass did not take a facilitating role in extracurricular activities in the same way that Mr. Nelson did, she was a frequent spectator at events that mattered to students such as athletic games, plays, and band concerts. Both she and Mr. Nelson went out of their way to witness students in the areas where the students were invested or excelled.

Additionally, both teachers were always available and accessible to students. Mrs. Compass worked long hours and flexibly tailored those hours to meet the needs of students. She was consistently and predictably available for academic help, and she always made it clear to students that she enjoyed working with them. Similarly, Mr. Nelson ensured students felt welcome in the art room whenever he was there, and many

students spent their lunches or free periods in his classroom, stopping by to check in with Mr. Nelson or just coming to join in the conversation. Mr. Nelson stated it simply, "I give them time; they come talk to me."

While this was not as prevalent a practice for Mr. Fitzgerald due to his more limited out-of-class availability, he did make himself available for both current and former students to provide them with support on things that mattered to them. Many former students would come to him for help on their college essays and appreciated this help because "it was personal to them; they felt like that was such a gift of time that I gave them" (Mr. Fitzgerald Interview #1, 10/4/2018). Because Mr. Fitzgerald was available to help former students with their writing, and because he would frequently acknowledge and engage with them in the hallways, he maintained relationships with students even when he no longer taught them.

Influence of dimensions of identity. The focal teachers' ability to be consistently present in the school was influenced by both their current life experiences and their role. Teachers' current life experiences especially their family composition impacted the amount of time they had to attend or be involved in extracurricular events. Since Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass's children were either in college or already adults, they did not currently have the same family demands on their time that they had had when their children were younger and at home. In contrast, Mr. Fitzgerald was currently the father of two sons under the age of five; therefore, he was often not as available outside of the confines of the school day because he had to get home to be with his own children. Thus, while Mr. Fitzgerald was a consistent presence in class, he was not as consistent of a presence within the school community.

Additionally, the teachers' roles influenced their ability to be present and available outside of a designated class time. As an English teacher, Mr. Fitzgerald often spent a lot of his time outside of class grading and preparing for class, and while Mr. Nelson also had some of these same demands on his time, the grading in particular appeared less time-consuming in an art class. Although Mrs. Compass worked long hours, she acknowledged that she did not have class preparation or grading to do as most of her support was responsive to students' in-the-moment needs. Thus, she did not take work home with her, so she did not need to balance attending students' extracurricular activities with classroom preparation and grading. Additionally, due to their roles, Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass were more accessible during the day. As the co-director of academic support, Mrs. Compass was usually in the academic support room and available to help students with what they needed or to simply engage in conversation with them. Likewise, the more informal structure of Mr. Nelson's art classes made it possible for students to stop by while he was teaching to ask a question or to join in the conversation without creating a disruption to the class. In contrast, as an English teacher, Mr. Fitzgerald had a much more structured schedule throughout the day that limited the time he was available to engage with students outside of class time.

In addition to these five common themes shared by the focal teachers, there were also certain themes that stood out as being unique or much more prevalent for one of the focal teachers. In the section below I discuss these unique themes for each focal teacher and consider how their identity informed each practice.

Mr. Nelson: Transparency & mentoring students.

Mr. Nelson had two interrelated practices that were unique to him: transparency and mentoring students. Mr. Nelson openly shared his life story with his students, so they could learn from his mistakes and recognize themselves in some of his experiences. In addition to sharing his story, Mr. Nelson also acted as a mentor, who regularly dispensed life advice to his Black male students both generally and more pointedly when students sought his counsel on personal issues. Mr. Nelson made a habit of taking students under his wing, in particular those who seemed lost, in need of guidance, and or in want of artistic direction. Many of the Black male students at Corby saw Mr. Nelson as someone who was helping them to survive and thrive as Black male adolescents in a racially diverse school where most of the teachers and administrators were White. While students acknowledged that they frequently had discussion with all the focal teachers about non-school related issues, and several students referenced confiding in Mrs. Compass about personal issues or turning to her for advice, Mr. Nelson was the only teacher who students described as a mentor and particularly as a mentor who "guides the Black students" (Darius Interview #2, 4/9/2019). Through his transparency and role as a mentor Mr. Nelson was able to build strong relationship with his students because he demonstrated a politicized care for them by recognizing their specific needs and realities as Black male adolescents.

***Influence of dimensions of identity*.** Mr. Nelson's emphasis on transparency and mentoring as two primary ways to initiate and maintain relationships with his Black male students appeared to be influenced by his race, his gender, his life experience, and his role as an art teacher. Like his students, Mr. Nelson had attended a school where he had had to regularly navigate interactions with people from a variety of racial backgrounds.

Additionally, many of the life experiences he shared with his students were informed by his race and gender, and thus in sharing his life experiences he demonstrated how students could navigate similar situations as Black male adolescents. Mr. Nelson's shared race and gender at times helped him to make an initial connection with his Black male students, but these internal traits alone did not determine his status as a mentor. Students viewed him as a mentor because he was a reliable person who they could depend on to listen to them and provide valuable insight and life advice. Because Mr. Nelson was honest about his own life experiences and the mistakes that he had made, students viewed him as a less intimidating and more understanding adult, who they could open up to without fear of judgment. As one of the few Black men in the school, Mr. Nelson had an insight into students' experiences that many other teachers did not share and thus he was more equipped to guide his Black male students as they began to develop a stronger sense of their racial identity. Germaine, however, made an important clarification noting that while many Black male students were drawn to Mr. Nelson because he was one of only a few Black male teachers at Corby, his shared race and gender alone did not automatically make Mr. Nelson or any other Black male teacher a mentor. Mr. Nelson was ultimately a strong mentor because he was committed to his students and genuinely cared about them and their future success.

Additionally, given his role as an instructor in a course that had a more informal structure, Mr. Nelson had the time and space to share his stories, to engage in transparent conversation with students around issues that mattered to them, and to provide his students with life advice. Overall, all aspects of Mr. Nelson's identity appeared to influence why and how he enacted the practices of transparency and mentoring.

Mr. Fitzgerald: Providing opportunities for redemption.

One of the key practices Mr. Fitzgerald implemented to initiate and maintain productive relationships with his Black male students was providing students opportunities for redemption. Mr. Fitzgerald gave his students chances to re-work and re-submit assignments, so the students would better understand the material and also have an opportunity to raise their grades. He took a similar approach to addressing behavioral issues or tensions in the student-teacher relationship. He approached these situations from an inquiry-based and solution-oriented stance. He wanted to ensure that he and his students both had the same perception of what had occurred and that they had a plan for addressing the issue, so they could move forward in a positive and constructive manner. By offering opportunities for redemption, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to maintain effective relationships with students and to repair or prevent relational harm. He told me, "I think it can be a temptation to always bring down the hammer, show them you are serious about things, prosecute things to the fullest extent, but I think it is not always the best way" (Fitzgerald Interview #2, 12/5/2018). Instead, Mr. Fitzgerald tried to de-escalate situations by assuming a default mode of *helping not harming students*. Mr. Fitzgerald demonstrated a politicized care for his students through his genuine desire to understand his Black male students' perspective and to communicate to his students that he was invested in upholding their socio-emotional well-being and academic standing.

***Influence of dimensions of identity*.** Mr. Fitzgerald's willingness to offer opportunities for redemption, re-set his relationship with students, and examine his own assumptions appeared to be necessary for maintaining his relationship with his Black male students because there seemed to be more potential for tension in his relationships

with students than was the case for the other two focal teachers. The greater potential for tension arose from two specific dimensions of Mr. Fitzgerald's identity: his position as a White man and his role as an instructor in a core subject where grades were used as markers of achievement and gateways to future opportunities. As a White man, Mr. Fitzgerald recognized the role his race played in the way students might interpret his handling of tense situations. He recognized that due to previous interactions some of his Black male students had had with White teachers, the trust between him and his students was always somewhat tentative. Therefore, in each interaction with students, he seemed to be conscious of the fragility of that trust. As a result, he approached potentially contentious situations with students from a place of understanding and tried to be intentional about his choice of language, so he never appeared to be accusing or threatening a student. While many White teachers will automatically remove students from the classroom at the first sign of tension, Mr. Fitzgerald addressed the tension with the student directly, asked questions to better understand the students' intentions, and solicited his students' perspectives on the situation. Therefore, he was often able to ease tensions that arose between him and his Black male students without imposing harsh consequences or referring the student to an administrator. Through his actions, he communicated to his students that his intention was to help them not harm them and established himself as someone who was trustworthy because he demonstrated a respect for his Black male students and his relationship with them.

Additionally because Mr. Fitzgerald was an English teacher, the grades students earned in his class could potentially affect students' future educational opportunities. Thus, if students did not receive grades with which they were satisfied, this situation

could create tension in the relationship as students may view the grade as a form of criticism, judgement, or bias. Mr. Fitzgerald deliberately tried to mitigate this tension by giving his students opportunities to revise and re-submit work. In this way, he maintained his high expectations for students, but also provided them a greater sense of agency over their grades. In returning some of the agency to the students, Mr. Fitzgerald lessened the power dynamic in the classroom and eased the tension that can be inherent in the student-teacher relationship when grades are at stake.

Mrs. Compass: Unconditional positive regard and focus on growth.

While none of the focal teachers interacted with their students in a negative manner, Mrs. Compass's positive outlook was a much more prominent part of her approach to relationships with Black male students. Her positivity and her asset-based approach to working with students were two of the primary ways she initiated and maintained productive relationships with students. Her students described her as exuding positivity in a manner that had a profound effect on them and their perceptions of their own abilities, as she was always genuinely happy to help them and primarily focused on their improvement rather than their GPAs. The students I interviewed relayed that in many places at Corby they felt stereotyped, judged, or disregarded, but they never felt judged or ignored by Mrs. Compass. Due to her unwavering positivity and unrelenting belief in them and their capabilities, her Black male students believed that she genuinely wanted to see them succeed and they felt good about themselves when they were in her presence.

Influence of dimensions of identity. Mrs. Compass's role as the co-director of academic support had a profound influence on how she demonstrated her positivity and placed a primary focus on student growth. In this role, she had the freedom to focus exclusively on growth because she did not have to issue grades to students and because she had regular opportunities to engage with students in a one-on-one manner and provide individualized support. As the co-director of academic support, Mrs. Compass could take a more nuanced view of students because she witnessed students' progress over time and thus understood how far they had come even if they weren't quite there yet.

The overall influence of dimensions of teacher identity.

While all three focal teachers were able to initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students, as has been evidenced in the previous section the four main dimensions of their identity: a) their race, b) their gender, c) their life experience, and d) their position at Corby High School influenced the manner in which they enacted those practices and the overall progression of the relationship. In this section I provide a brief summary of the ways each dimension of identity influenced the overall manner in which the focal teachers initiated and maintained relationships with their Black male students.

Race. For each of the teachers, race played a significant role in how they were able to initiate and maintain relationships with their Black male students. To varying extents, the teacher's race influenced how they interacted with students in a humanizing manner, how they engaged students in conversations about race, how they working with students to engage them as active participants in their own learning, and how they

prepared students for short and long term success. Additionally, race had a larger influence on Mr. Nelson's practices of transparency and mentoring and Mr. Fitzgerald's practice of offering opportunities for redemption.

In addition to the ways race influenced their enactment of these specific practices, the teacher's race also influenced the overall progression of the relationship. For both Mr. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Compass, their Whiteness could at times make it more difficult initially for them to establish a sense of trust with some of their Black male students who admitted to sometimes being more hesitant to trust a White teacher. Roger explained, "Race kind of plays a part because, for me, as an African-American boy, I probably would feel safer, quicker with the African-American teacher" (Roger Interview #2, 4/30/2019). Ultimately, Mr. Fitzgerald and Mrs. Compass successfully established productive relationships with their Black male students because they did not take their students' lack of trust personally and were patient and persistent in their efforts to connect with their Black male students.

Race also mattered in terms of how Mr. Nelson initiated and maintained relationships with his Black male students. His racial and cultural background made it easier initially for some Black male students to connect with Mr. Nelson and to feel comfortable in his presence. They felt that Mr. Nelson's "vibe" and "energy" more closely approximated the "energy" of their homes. Their shared racial background also allowed students to open up to him about personal problems, particularly those surrounding race-based issues that they did not necessarily feel comfortable broaching with most White teachers. While Mr. Nelson's strong relationships were based on much

more than cultural affinity, his position as one of the few Black men in the school facilitated the initial connection with many Black male students.

Gender. Of all of the dimensions of identity, gender seemed to have the least impact on the focal teachers' relationships with their Black male students. Gender seemed to be most significant when viewed in terms of the intersectionality of race and gender, particularly for the male teachers. For Mr. Nelson some of his practices such as mentoring, conversations about race, and transparency were influenced by not only his race but also the complex intersection of his race and gender. It was clear for each of these practices that Mr. Nelson's approach was influenced by both aspects of his identity and could not have been enacted in the same way either by a teacher of another race or by a Black female teacher. The intersectionality of race and gender also appeared to be a prevalent factor in Mr. Fitzgerald's relationships with Black male students. His identity as a White man appeared, at times, to create greater possibility for tension in his relationships since some Black male students might consider a White male teacher as more threatening than a White female teacher.

Gender also had other subtle influences on the focal teachers approach to relationships. For example, because Mr. Fitzgerald shared the same gender as his students and, like his students, had attended Corby, he had an initial point of connection with his Black male students. Mrs. Compass's gender also played a small role in her connection with students because her Black male students often viewed her as a nurturing figure since she was a woman. At an all-boys school where the majority of faculty is male, Mrs. Compass could engage with her students in a more nurturing and motherly way, which often helped her to form an almost parental bond with students.

Life experience. Outside of their race, life experience was one of the primary dimensions of identity that influenced teachers' ability to relate to their Black male students. Their life experiences informed their worldviews, particularly their beliefs about race and privilege, which influenced how the teachers interacted with their Black male students in a humanizing manner and their level of comfort engaging with students in conversations about race. Additionally, their life experience encompassed their educational background, professional development, and work experiences, all factors that influenced their ability to prepare students for the future and the manner in which they engaged students as active participants in their own learning. Furthermore, the focal teachers' current life stages and family composition influenced the ways they were able to be present in the students' school lives and active in the school community. Overall the teachers' life experience seemed to have a large influence on their sense of self-efficacy, cultural awareness, and level of empathy, which seemed to be important factors influencing the way they initiated and maintained relationship with Black male students.

Institutional role. Perhaps one of the most salient aspects of the teachers' identities that affected how they initiated and maintained relationship with their Black male students was their primary instructional role at Corby High School. The role they had at the school determined to what degree the students had choice in whether or not to enter into the relationship, the freedom the teacher had to determine the class structure, the material they put in front of students, and whether or not the teacher was required to issue grades for students. As such, the teachers' roles influenced how they approached every practice they enacted.

As an English teacher, Mr. Fitzgerald experienced both some barriers to forming productive relationships with students and some opportunities. Being an English teacher at a parochial school where he had total control over his curriculum, Mr. Fitzgerald had the opportunity to construct academic experiences that he believed would engage his Black male students through the curriculum, such as writing assignments based on students' personal experiences, time for independent reading, and selection of culturally relevant classroom texts. However, his role as a teacher in a core subject area also meant that the students who entered his classroom were always required to be there and had no control over this decision. Additionally, he was required to issues grades to students, which could potentially influence their access to future opportunity. These factors created a greater potential for tension to arise in Mr. Fitzgerald's relationships with students, and thus he, more than Mr. Nelson or Mrs. Compass needed to be always conscious of the status of his relationship with students and the ways he navigated those tensions so as to sustain the quality of his relationships with his Black male students.

Mrs. Compass did not have the same concerns as Mr. Fitzgerald since all of the students who attended academic support were there voluntarily. As a result, Mrs. Compass experienced relatively little tension in her relationship with students, so they almost exclusively viewed her as someone who was on their side. This perception was strengthened because Mrs. Compass did not issue grades. Consequently, students never felt as if Mrs. Compass was making a final judgement on their abilities, and they were free to maintain a vision of her as "the guardian angel" that would always help them out.

Additionally, the only demand on Mrs. Compass's time was to provide assistance and aid to students. She did not have to worry about preparing her own course materials

or grading assignments, which allowed her the freedom to give one hundred percent of her attention to addressing students' needs. Furthermore, since Mrs. Compass did not teach one specific subject or grade, her relationship with students spanned multiple years often deepening each year. All of these aspects of her role as the co-director of academic support helped her establish a positive rapport with students within a relationship where students perceived her as an ally working alongside them to support them in meeting the goals that were important to them.

Mr. Nelson's role as an art teacher positioned him somewhere between Mrs. Compass and Mr. Fitzgerald. Art at Corby was a graded elective. Thus while students were required to take a music or an art elective, they had some choice over the actual class they took, and thus did have some agency over whether they chose to take Mr. Nelson's class. Additionally, while Mr. Nelson assigned grades in art, students felt less pressure and anxiety around their grade in art because unlike in their core classes such as English, their grade in art was based more on their ability to follow direction and put forth effort rather than on adherence to conventions. Students thus felt they had a greater level of control over their grade in art. Additionally, as Germaine noted, "you can draw and talk" (Germaine Interview #1, 2/13/2019), so given the more informal structure of an art class, Mr. Nelson could use class time to engage in meaningful conversation with his students, which helped create a foundation for a strong interpersonal bond.

Overall, the findings from the cross case analysis reveal that there are many different practices teachers can enact to build productive relationships with their Black male students, yet these practices at times need to be modified to take into consideration the different dimensions of each teacher's identity so that the teachers' interactions with

students are authentic rather than forced. These findings suggest that all teachers are capable of initiating and maintaining relationships with Black male students, but race may matter in terms of the initial trajectory of the relationship, the way Black male students and their teachers engage in conversation about race, and the purpose the relationship fulfills for their Black male students. However it seems that other dimensions of the teacher's identity, such as their life experiences and worldviews as well as the affordances and constraints of their institutional roles may in fact have a greater influence on how teachers build lasting and productive relationship with their Black male students.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Study Overview

In U.S. schools, teachers often struggle to initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students (Irvine, 2003; Ladson- Billings, 1994; Lynn et al., 2010; Milner, 2015; Wilson, 2016). This problem is exacerbated by the emphasis that teacher education programs and school systems place on teachers' content knowledge and instructional practices at the expense of adequately developing teachers' relational practices (Konjufu, 2018, Ladson-Billings, 2001, Milner, 2015, Murrell, 2001). As a result, Black male students often experience fractured relationships with teachers, and Black male adolescents continue to lag behind most of their peers in measurements of academic achievement. These results hold true for Black male youth in urban schools that are primarily attended by students of color as well as for Black male adolescents in more racially and socioeconomically diverse schools (Allen, 2010; Diamond, 2006; Gordon, 2012; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Voight, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to identify ways that teachers initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with Black male secondary school students in a racially and socio-economically diverse high school, and to understand how different dimensions of the teachers' identities, particularly their race, gender, life experience, and role at the school, influence the way they approach relationships with their Black male students. A collective case study design was used to investigate the relational practices of three teachers, who were all veteran educators at Corby High School, a racially diverse all-boys parochial high school in a suburb of a mid-Atlantic city. The teachers had all been student-identified as teachers who consistently built productive relationship with Black male students and were purposefully selected to provide a sample of teachers with

different combinations of racial and gender identities. The three focal teachers, Mrs. Compass, a White female co-director of academic support, Mr. Fitzgerald, a White male English teacher, and Mr. Nelson, a Black male art teacher, each served as an individual instrumental case for the study.

Data collection for the study took place during the 2018-2019 school year. It included three in depth interviews with each focal teacher, two interviews with each of eight Black male students (for each focal teacher, 2-3 students were selected to specifically speak to their relationship with that teacher), three classroom observations for each teacher, the collection of artifacts, and additional information gathered during informal conversations with the focal teachers. Within case and cross-case analyses were performed to identify the relational practices teachers used with their Black male students, and to explore how those practice were modified based on the teacher's identity.

As a result of the cross-case analysis, I identified five relational practices that were prevalent for at least two of the three teachers, and in most cases for all three teachers. These findings address the first research question: *How do teachers at a racially and socio-economically diverse high-school initiate and maintain productive student-teacher relationships with their Black male students?* The focal teachers used the following practices to initiate and maintain relationship with Black male youth:

1) They interacted with student in a humanizing manner.

2) They engaged in conversations about race with students.

3) They engaged students as active participants in their own learning.

4) They prepared students for short and long-term success.

5) They were consistently present in the students' school lives.

Through the cross case analysis, I also identified unique relational practices that certain teachers employed as well as differences in how the teachers enacted their common practices. These findings address the second research question: *How does a teacher's identity, particularly their race, gender, life experience, and institutional role, influence the way they approach relationships with their Black male students?* While the five practices mentioned above were demonstrated by at least two of the three focal teachers, the individual teachers' prioritization of each practice and the manner by which each teacher enacted the practice varied based on one or more of the following factors: the teacher's race, gender, life experience, and/or instructional role. Additionally, some unique themes emerged for each teacher that can, to some extent be attributed to the individual teacher's specific dimensions of identity: Mrs. Compass demonstrated unconditional positive regard for her students and took an asset-based approach that prioritized growth; Mr. Fitzgerald offered opportunities for academic and behavioral redemption; Mr. Nelson was transparent with students and mentored students.

These findings contribute to the understanding of how teachers initiate and maintain productive relationships with Black male students in the following ways: a) demonstrate that practices that have previously been found to be effective with Black male students in urban schools are also effective when implemented by teachers in more racially & socioeconomically diverse school settings, b) provide multiple visions of how teachers enact effective relational teaching practices, particularly in terms of how teachers modify their practice based on their own personal identity, c) identify that effective relational pedagogies of Black educators cannot be simply replicated by White teachers, but must be modified to take into consideration the White teacher's identity and

position in the classroom, d) demonstrate how effective instructional practices and effective relational practices are both necessary and mutually supportive, and e) identify certain school structures that facilitate the formation of positive relationships between teachers and Black male adolescents.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing how each of the relational practices identified through this study contributes to the existent literature. I next explain implications for this work from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research.

Relationally Effective Practices

In this section, I address how the findings from this study confirm and extend previous research on educators' relationally effective practices with Black male youth. Before discussing each of the individual practices, I want to acknowledge that the majority of the relationally effective practices identified in this study confirm practices that have been previously described in the literature on effective teachers of Black male adolescents. However, the findings from this study provide an important addition to this literature because they expand the applications of these practices to a more racially and socioeconomically diverse school setting. As such, this study illustrates that the same practices that have previously been found to be effective with Black male youth and other students of color in urban schools, serving primarily students of color, are also effective with Black male students in non-urban, more racially integrated settings. In fact, teachers in more racially diverse schools may need to be more intentional about their relational engagement with Black male students because teachers in diverse settings may be more

inclined to claim a color-blind stance toward students and less likely to acknowledge or address issues of race with their Black male students.

Additionally, while many researchers have examined the relational practices of Black female teachers, White female teachers, and Black male teachers who have established effective relationships with their Black male students, very few studies provide an in-depth discussion of how White male teachers enact effective relational practices with Black male students (see Appendix A). Thus, this study expands on the existing research by providing a detailed description of one White male teacher's relational practices with Black male students. Finally, the findings from this study provide evidence that while the identified relational practices can be authentically enacted by teachers of different races and genders, they may be enacted differently based on the following dimensions of a teacher's identity: race, gender, life experience, and institutional role.

Interacting with students in a humanizing manner.

In this study, I found that teachers utilized small acts of positive acknowledgement as an important first step when initiating relationships with Black male students. As many Black male adolescents often feel that they are either targeted or ignored in school (Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2014; Irvine, 2003; Lynn et al., 2010; Noguera, 2008; Watson, 2018), they can at times be hesitant to trust or authentically engage with their teachers. However, in this study, I found when a teacher recognized students and positively acknowledged their presence; the students were willing to engage with that teacher in a productive manner. The recognition could be as simple as the teacher greeting them when they passed them in the hallway because it appeared the

consistency of the acknowledgment was far more important to students than the magnitude of the act. Through these small interactions with their students over time, teachers paved the way for a productive relationship to form. This practice of simple acknowledgement aligns both with the tenets of a praxis of politicized care (Watson, 2018) and with prior research that emphasizes that for teachers to effectively engage with students of color, they must recognize their students' humanity and communicate to students that they are worthy of being seen (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010; Watson, Sealy-Ruiz & Jackson; 2016).

One of the primary ways the focal teachers started to slowly build a "common bond" (Rogers, 2009) with students was by taking a holistic perspective of the students that honored them as multifaceted people with multiple talents and skills (Brooms, 2019; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; Kang, 2006; McKamey, 2011; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Milner, 2016; Thompson, 1998; Ware 2006; Warren & Bonilla, 2018; Watson-Sealy-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). Taking a holistic view of their Black male students required the focal teachers to acknowledge their students' Blackness and the impact that race and gender had on their students' daily experiences and sense of identity rather than adopting a color-blind approach (Dance, 2012). Given this understanding, the focal teachers, particularly the two White teachers in the study, took the time to get to know their students and were patient and persistent in the relationship-building process. They recognized that students brought prior experiences to the relationship that could make them wary of trusting a teacher, especially if the teacher did not share their race and gender. As a result, the

teachers approached their students with an awareness of their own racial positionality that recognized how their race and gender and the race and gender of their Black male students could potentially impact their initial interactions. They did not take negative or apathetic student responses personally, but instead they demonstrated through their actions that they were invested in the students and wanted to get to know them.

Teachers' recognition of their students' humanity, their belief in students' capacities and potential, and their recognition of their students' social and political realities as Black male youth in America are all ways teachers express politicized care for their students (Watson, 2018). As demonstrated, the recognition of students as holistic beings and a belief in their potential are necessary pre-requisites for initiating and maintaining a working alliance with Black male students. Black male youth cannot be expected to form an authentic bond with teachers who do not recognize their humanity, and teachers cannot recognize a student's humanity until they have reflected on how their personal beliefs and bias acknowledge or deny that humanity. As a part of a praxis of politicized care, teachers must adopt a stance of vulnerability where they are willing to examine their own assumptions and create opportunities for open dialogue where they can listen and learn from their students. Therefore, these findings support the inclusion of both teacher identity and a praxis of politicized care as important additional elements for understanding how teachers develop working alliances with Black male adolescents.

Engaging in conversations about race with students.

In this study, all three focal teachers demonstrated a willingness to engage with students in meaningful conversations about race. Regardless of the teacher's racial background, their Black male students seemed willing to discuss race-related issues with

them because the teachers approached the conversation from a place of respect and empathy, and acknowledged the existence of racism and oppression. This finding is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the importance of teachers establishing trust with students of color and creating space in the curriculum and classroom for open dialogue and difficult conversations about race (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Watson, 2018; Woodward, 2018). Teachers can start to establish that trust by adopting a praxis of politicized care and directly acknowledging the historical, economic, and sociopolitical realities and the injustices their Black male students encounter in their daily lives (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Fergus et al., 2014; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Roberts, 2010; Thompson, 1998, Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016).

However, I found that the teacher's identity and their positionality had a strong influence on the way they engaged their Black male students in conversations about race. This finding confirms other researchers' claims that a teacher's racial and gender identity influence the way they approach relationships with their Black male students. Warren (2013) found that for White women, working with African American males, empathy was essential, and Moore & Smith (2019) highlighted that White teachers must have an awareness of the stressors faced by Black males to engage authentically with them. In contrast, other researchers stress the need for Black teachers to be more direct and straightforward in their communication with Black students, particularly when discussing racism and oppression. These scholars highlight the importance of color talk (Roberts, 2010; Thompson, 2004), the need for Black teachers to be transparent about their own

journey (Brooms, 2017; Fergus et al., 2014; Warren & Bonilla, 2018), and the importance of instilling students with racial pride (Brooms, 2017; Walker & Tomkins, 2004).

However, the findings from this study also extend upon this research. By looking at both White and Black teachers within the same setting, this study provides a clearer description of the different ways White and Black teachers make room for race-based conversation in their classrooms and how the content of those race-based conversation vary depending on the race of the teacher. When discussing race with their Black male students, White teachers often needed to be the ones to initiate the conversation, and they primarily broached race-related discussions either through the curriculum or during one-on-one conversations with individual students where the teacher expressed specific concerns for their Black male students' physical safety and emotional well-being. In contrast, when discussing race with Black teachers, Black male students felt more comfortable taking the initiative in the conversation and raising a wider variety of race-related issues that were often more personal in nature (i.e. police brutality, inter-racial relationships, experiences of discrimination, micro-aggressions). Students felt more comfortable discussing these issues with a Black male teacher because they felt he would have a greater understanding of their perspectives and therefore would be less likely to be judgmental or to make ignorant comments during the conversation.

Therefore, this study suggests that while White teachers can express empathy for their Black male students and vocally condemn racism at a personal and institutional level, Black teachers have a greater depth of understanding concerning their Black students' lived experiences. As a result, they can serve as guides on how to navigate institutional and personal racism in ways White teachers cannot. Therefore, it is

important that schools, especially schools with significant populations of Black male students or schools that are experiencing expansion in the number of Black male students make an intentional effort to recruit and retain Black male teachers.

Additionally, these findings suggest that while White teachers can enact a praxis of politicized care for their Black male students, their race does influence how they enact that care. The findings suggest that when building relationships with Black male students, White teachers in particular need to recognize that many of their Black male students may have had past negative experiences with White teachers and thus be patient and persistent when working to gain their trust. They must also be intentional about initiating race-related conversations in the classroom and intentionally select curricular materials that will provide opportunities to broach issues of identity, racism, and oppression. It is also important to communicate explicitly their anti-racist views through both their words and actions. Finally it is important to be aware and sensitive to their position in the classroom.

Additionally, when thinking about the working alliance, Black male students might have different expectations for the common goals they want to achieve when working with White and Black teachers. Black male students seemed to acknowledge their White teachers' ability to help them build the academic skills necessary to be successful in the future, while they recognized that their Black teachers not only provided this academic support but also helped them learn how to navigate the culture of power (Cross et al., 1999; Thompson, 2004).

Engaging students as active participants in their own learning.

In this study, focal teachers engaged students in productive relationships by allowing them to be active participants in their own learning. To engage students in their own learning focal teachers employed many strategies that have previously been found to be effective for engaging Black male youth and other students of color in productive working relationships with their teachers. These included constructing student-centered classrooms (McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Milner, 2016; Warren, 2013), presenting engaging and culturally relevant material (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 1994), and taking an inquiry-based stance (Thompson, 1998).

However, this study extends the existing literature by highlighting the importance of proximity and intentional intrusion, two additional practices identified in this study as means for effectively engaging Black male adolescent in the learning process. Proximity refers to teachers' physical proximity to students as they circulated among their Black male students and worked alongside them. Teachers' proximity to students establishes the teacher as a consultant or co-learner rather than a dispenser of knowledge. Intentional intrusion is a proactive support strategy where the teacher does not simply wait for a struggling student to request help but instead the teacher regularly immerses themselves in the students' work. This allows the teacher to not only see the end product but to also get a clear understanding of the students' thought process, which can aid the teacher in providing the student with more tailored support. These findings suggest that both strategies help teachers to lessen the power dynamic in the classroom, normalize a focus on the learning process, and ensure students get help when they need it not just when they ask for it (Reichert & Hawley, 2014): all strategies that seemed particularly important for

Black male students who are often educationally neglected in classrooms (Duncan, 2002; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2014; Irvine, 2003; Lynn et al., 2010; Noguera, 2008).

The above-mentioned practices all reflect a praxis of politicized care. Student-centered classrooms tend to be more responsive to student needs and to build upon students' assets as pathways to learning. Thus, teachers in these classrooms acknowledge the humanity of their students and provide students with the encouragement needed to meet high expectations successfully. Additionally, through practices like intentional intrusion teachers demonstrate care for students by demonstrating a belief in students' capabilities and by refusing to allow them to opt out of learning. When teachers use more student-centered pedagogical techniques to engage students in their own learning, the teachers maintain a working alliance because they consistently engage their Black male students in common tasks where they work alongside them to help them meet their learning outcomes.

Preparing students for short and long-term success.

In the findings from this study, the focal teachers helped prepare their students for the future by combining high expectations for students with dedicated support. These findings reinforce claims from numerous prior studies suggesting that to initiate and maintain productive relationship with students of color teachers must provide both academic press and instrumental support (Antrop-Gonzalez, & de Jesus, 2006; Brooms, 2019; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2000, Ladson-Billings, 1994, Roberts, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999; Ware, 2006, Warren & Bonilla, 2018, Watson, 2018).

The focal teachers in this study were all masters of their content areas and life-long learners who continually invested in improving their skills in order to better serve

their students, which reinforces Duncan-Andrade's (2009) claim that "quality teaching is the most significant 'material' resource they [teachers] have to offer students" (p.186). This finding also demonstrates that relationally effective practices do not need to and should not come at the expense of a teacher's content or pedagogical knowledge. Strong relationships must be built upon rapport, but in order for them to go beyond an interpersonal bond and become a true working alliance the teacher must be able to provide the students with strong content-based instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010; Murrell, 2001; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Thompson et al, 2008).

In addition to providing this strong content knowledge, the focal teachers in this study also explicitly taught students transferable skills such as time-management, decision-making, communication, and self-advocacy. In many cases, these skills are necessary for students' future success, and provide their Black male students with tools to successfully navigate the culture of power (Cross et al., 1999; Thompson, 2004; Walker & Tomkins, 2004). Additionally, the teachers helped their students develop positive self-concepts and growth-minded approaches to learning; both mindset that will help students to successfully adapt to new environments and new endeavors.

These findings align with one of the primary components of both a praxis of politicized care and working alliance theory: a concern for students' futures (Roberts, 2010) that prioritizes common goals (Rogers, 2009). To prepare Black male students for the future, the common goals of the working alliance must go beyond specific academic learning outcomes to encompass the development of more global and transferable skills and perspectives as well. In addition, these findings emphasize the importance of the teacher's strong content knowledge as a necessary quality for teachers to possess in order

to adequately support their students' future success. This combination of maintaining high expectations and then having the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to encourage and support students as they work toward those goals is one of the essential elements of a praxis of politicized care and also a necessary component in any productive working alliance.

Being consistently present in students' school lives.

The findings from this study highlighted the importance of teachers being present and willing to engage with students outside of the classroom. When teachers were available outside of the classroom as sources of academic support and mentoring, they created opportunities to form productive relationships with students. Their availability communicated that they were invested in their students' success, so students often became more willing to seek support. Additionally, teachers' presence at school events and their support of students' extracurricular interests made teachers seem more approachable and allowed the students to form a more personal connection with the teacher. These finding confirm that when teachers go above and beyond for students (Ladson-Billing, 1994; Nelson, 2016; Webb & Blond, 1995), integrate themselves into the larger community of the school (Milner, 2016), demonstrate a deep emotional investment in students through their sacrifice of time (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; Warren & Bonilla, 2018), and make an effort to observe students in "arenas close to their heart" (Reichert & Hawley, 2014), students are more willing to engage in relationship with teachers.

These findings expand on previous research by highlighting the importance of student-teacher relationships that remain stable across multiple years. Based on prior

negative experiences, many Black male students may be wary of adults in positions of authority, particularly White adults. Therefore, students may need time to get to know a teacher before they can place their trust in the teacher and open up to them. This trust is an essential component of any working alliance, and thus it is important that students have opportunities to become familiar with teachers outside of the classroom, so that they can more easily connect with them inside the classroom. Students also appear to benefit from having a steady and consistent source of support across the multiple years they are at a school.

These findings provide further support for the critical need to embed a praxis of politicized care as a defining characteristic of working alliances with Black male adolescents. Working alliance theory suggests that a bond is often formed in the process of working on a common task in pursuit of common goal, but the findings from this study suggest the establishment of trust and care are essential pre-requisites to the formation of the initial bond. Thus, students and teacher often need time and opportunities to bond outside of the classroom, so that the working alliances can be productive in the classroom.

Additionally, this study suggests that a teacher's instructional role and current life stage can at times influence the extent to which they can invest time in getting to know students outside the classroom. Therefore, it is also important to consider how schools can build time for some of these more informal interactions into the school day.

Furthermore, I found that in a racially diverse school, teachers' presence in the school community at times held different meanings for Black male students based on the teacher's race. When White teachers were involved in the school community, particularly

when they attended individual student's extracurricular events, it confirmed for their Black male students that the teacher was in invested in them as a person, and they were then more willing to trust the teacher. This also held true for Black teachers; however, there was an added layer to Mr. Nelson's visible presence in the school community. Because Corby had so few Black teachers and some students would never have a class with a Black teacher, the Black teachers' visibility in the larger school community sent Black male students a message that they belonged and allowed them to feel more comfortable at the school.

Mentoring.

The findings from this study highlight that unlike the two White teachers, the one Black male teacher, Mr. Nelson, provided an important mentoring role for students who often approached him for advice. While many students also asked Mrs. Compass, the White female teacher, for life advice, the nature of the advice differed. Mr. Nelson was able to connect with students through his candor and transparency about his own struggles and lived experiences. Students saw him as someone with whom they had a cultural connection and felt they could communicate with him in a manner that was closer to how they interacted with their family and friends, and thus felt more like themselves in his classroom. This finding reinforces previous research that suggests Black teachers can provide classroom environments that are at times more familiar and thus more inviting for some Black youth (Howard, 2002; Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017). Given this greater level of comfort, Black male students were often more willing to approach Mr. Nelson with personal

concerns, especially when those concerns centered on struggles related to their racial or gender identity.

These findings support previous research on the important role Black teachers and in particular Black male teachers can play for Black male students by acting as informal advisors or life coaches, who can guide adolescent during a time when they are often builder a stronger sense of racial identity (Brooms, 2019; Broom, 2017; Cross et al, 1999; Fergus et al., 2014; McKinney de Royston et al, 2017).

In addition to confirming the overall call to recruit more Black male teachers into the profession, this study reinforces that Black male teachers' presence may be even more vital in racially diverse schools. At Corby, despite the fact that almost half of the student body was comprised of Black male students, there were very few Black male teachers. Additionally, the school had, over the past decade, experienced a demographic shift as the number of Black male students dramatically increased. While most of the students I interviewed reported for the most part that they had had a positive experience at Corby, many also recounted incidences where they had felt ignored, encountered microagressions, experienced racial tensions at the school, or felt that certain teachers' perceptions of them were informed by stereotypical or biased assumptions. These findings suggest that it is important to create spaces in racially diverse schools for Black male students to have time and space to meet with Black male faculty, such as was created both in Mr. Nelson's art room and in the BSU, so they can discuss issues of concerns that they might not feel as comfortable raising among their classmates or teachers who are not Black.

These findings around the importance of mentoring provide a concrete example of the utility of the conceptual framework for this study. In this case, Mr. Nelson's identity as a Black male teacher affected the manner in which he was able to demonstrate an explicit praxis of politicized care that fore-fronted the interests of his Black male students in a way that led to a constructive working alliance. For Mr. Nelson, the working alliances he formed with students were not constrained to his art classes, but also occurred in other spaces such as the BSU or when he visited other teachers' classes. The common goal he was working towards with students was not only the development of their academic skills but also the development of a sense of cultural awareness that would help them to develop pride in their racial identity and cope with and navigate incidences of racism at the school and in the larger world. In this way, Mr. Nelson exemplified the type of care Walker & Tomkins (1999) describe as being emblematic of Black teachers in the segregated South, in which "to care for the students for whom they had been given responsibility was to provide them with a storehouse of tools for thwarting a deeply imbedded system of inequality" (p. 91).

Providing opportunities for redemption.

In this study, I found that Mr. Fitzgerald frequently created opportunities for redemption as a way to both establish and maintain trust in his relationships with his Black male students. Mr. Fitzgerald wanted to ensure that students had an opportunity to be heard, a practice that is consistent with other scholars assertions that students want teachers to listen to them and allow them opportunities to explain rather jump to assumptions (Harper et al., 2014; Howard, 2014; Nelson, 2016; Rodriguez, 2008). However, findings from this study expand on this concept by suggesting that this practice

is more essential for White teachers, particularly White male teachers, who Black male students may view as more of a threat than a source of support. Thus, teachers, particular White male teachers, must communicate to students through their words and actions that their intention is to help students succeed. White teachers can communicate this message by examining their own assumptions and admitting fault when warranted (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Raider-Roth, 2005; Reichert & Hawley, 2014), by listening to their students and allowing them opportunities to explain, and by ensuring students understand what they have done to upset or offend the teacher. Additionally, they can provide students the time and space to self-correct before they automatically enforce consequences.

According to working alliance theory, the teacher is the relational manager. As the relational manager, one of the teacher's primary goals should be to navigate tensions within the relationship effectively (Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Rogers, 2009). The findings from this study suggest several concrete ways those tensions can be managed. First, it must be determined who is in need of redemption. For White teachers, the concept of redemption not only refers to allowing students the opportunity to redeem themselves in the eyes of the teacher, but it also provides the teacher the opportunity to redeem themselves in the eyes of the student. If a teacher's actions or approach to a student has been informed by implicit bias, the teacher must acknowledge this to the students and make amends if they want to maintain the trust in their relationship. Prior research finds that a teacher's race, gender, and level of cultural awareness can influence how the teacher interprets student behaviors as well as how students perceive the teachers' correction (Irvine, 2009; Milner, 2015; Redding, 2019). Many Black male

students have had previous negative experiences with White teachers, and thus their trust of White teachers is often tentative and can be easily ruptured. The loss of trust can also indicate a lack of a bond with the teacher, which can often, particularly for Black male students, disrupt the working alliance as they will not learn from someone they dislike or don't trust (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2008; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2002; Irvine, 2009; Konjufu, 2018). Thus, the first step in addressing behavioral incidents with students is for the teacher to clearly and calmly describe the behavior and why the teacher interpreted it as being disruptive or inappropriate. The teacher should then allow the student an opportunity to explain their interpretation of the behavior and their perspective on the incident. Even if the teacher has accurately interpreted the behavior, it is still important to allow an opportunity for redemption. The teacher should use precise language that critiques the behavior rather than the students and provides a clear road forward for the students. This approach communicates to the student that the teacher's issue is with the behavior not the student and allows the teacher and the student to positively re-set the relationship. Additionally, it provides students the opportunity to self-correct and assert agency in the relationship. Thus, it is important for teachers and students to have time and space to have rational conversations where they can work through their tensions and re-set their relationships.

The findings around redemption provide a second concrete example of the applicability of the conceptual framework. Mr. Fitzgerald's racial identity affected how he was positioned in relation to his Black male students within the classroom. His acknowledgement of his positon allowed him to enact elements of a praxis of politicized care in his interactions with his Black male students by approaching potentially

contentious encounters from a space of "vulnerability' and "communication" (Watson, 2018). This demonstration of care for the students ensured that the students returned to the classroom and continued to participate in the working alliance as they engaged in the common classroom tasks that would moving them toward the learning goal.

The Influence of Dimensions of Teacher's Identity on Relational Practices

In this study, I not only sought to identify the relational practices that teachers could use to initiate and maintain relationships with their Black males students, but I also sought to understand the influence certain dimensions of teacher's identity namely race, gender, life experience, and institutional role had on those relational practices. In this section, I address this second research question as I discuss the influence of teacher identity on relational practices.

These findings align with prior research that indicates that a teacher's race and to some extent their gender matter in terms of how teachers initiate and maintain relationships with their Black male students (Brooms, 2017; Brockenbrough, 2014; Dee, 2004; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Gershenson et al., 2016; Irvine & Roberts, 2009; Redding; 2019; Toldson, 2013; Warren, 2013); however, I found that other aspects of a teacher's identity such as their institutional role and how their life experiences have influenced their self-efficacy, cultural awareness, and level of empathy are perhaps more important factors when initiating and maintaining relationships with Black male students.

While in this study race was not a determining factor in whether teachers could successfully engage in productive relationships with their Black male students, it did have a significant influence on how teachers approached those relationships and the overall nature of the relationship. In particular, the findings suggest that White teachers

cannot simply replicate the relational practices that Black educators use to effectively establish relationships with Black male adolescents. While the underlying pedagogy or principle may be the same, teachers of different racial backgrounds need to modify these practices to acknowledge that they do not have the first-hand knowledge their students have with lived experiences of racism and oppression (Brockenbrough, 2014).

These findings build on the work of Duncan-Andrade (2007), who suggests that effective classroom practices with students of color do not need to look exactly the same but should be adapted to the unique personality of the teacher. In this study, I find that teachers must also adapt their relational pedagogies when working with Black male youth to not only account for differences in the teacher's personality, but also to account for other dimensions of their personal identity as well as the structures and limitations they encounter within their instructional roles. Additionally, the findings that certain practices must be enacted differently by White teachers aligns with the tenets Brockenbrough (2014) lays out in his theory of further mothering. He states, "In White supremacist milieus that continue to devalue black life, white women cannot be expected, nor should they be, to bring the same set of insights, instincts, and ways of being and knowing that black women bring to the care and education of black children"(p. 256). I likewise found that both White female and White male teachers could be strong advocates and allies for Black male students, but their knowledge of their Black male students' experiences could not reach the same depth of understanding of teachers who were both Black and male.

Additionally, I found that gender only seemed to have a significant influence when looked at through how it intersected with race and that this was most prominent for male teachers. I found that, for Mr. Nelson, his shared race and gender helped to facilitate

his relationships with Black male adolescents as has been founded in prior research on the importance of Black male educators (Brooms, 2019; Brooms, 2017; Fergus et al., 2014; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017). However, my findings also confirm the work of other researchers who suggest that while race and gender may be a potential starting point for relationships they alone are not enough if Black male teachers do not employ relationally effective practices (Brown, 2009; Bristol, 2015). The findings from this study also add to the literature by suggesting that White male teacher's shared gender identity but dissimilar racial identity may create more tension in their relationship with Black male students than exists with teachers who share both or neither of these dimensions of identity with their Black male students. Since Black male students may treat White male teachers with greater suspicion, White male teacher may need to address and lessen any sense of a power dynamic in the classroom and be much more deliberate and intentional in expressing empathy and respect for Black male students in order to build a relationship with them.

Additionally, these findings suggest that a teacher's beliefs about and attitudes towards Black male adolescents may be one of the most important factors in determining their ability to connect with their Black male students. Thus, life experiences that help to form teachers' beliefs and assumptions about Black male youth may be more important than the teachers' racial and gender identities. This claim aligns with other research that suggests that teachers beliefs and expectations about Black male students are two of the most important determinants of whether Black male students feel they can trust a teacher and that trust is often a pre-requisite for students to engage in a productive relationship with a teacher (Allen, 2015; Brooms, 2019; Canton, 2012; Fergus et al., 2014; Hunter &

Stinson, 2019; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017; Nelson, 2016; Watson, 2018; Woodward, 2018). In addition, studies have shown that teachers' self-efficacy and content mastery (Duncan- Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010; Murrell, 2001; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Thompson et al, 2008) were essential for them to effectively work alongside their students and help their students achieve their academic goals. As a result, teachers' prior work experience and educational background appear to be important assets that influence their ability to push their relationships with students beyond an interpersonal bond to forge a productive working alliance.

Finally, the findings from this study expand on previous research by thinking about how a teacher's institutional and instructional role influences the ways they initiate and maintain relationship with Black male students. The policies, procedures, and expectations of a school can either provide or constrain opportunities for student-teacher relationships. At Corby High School, many of policies appeared to facilitate relationships, especially the freedom teachers had over their curriculums and class structures. This freedom allowed the teachers to curate the content in their classrooms to meet the needs and appeal to the interests of their students. Additionally, the voluntary nature of the academic support program helped to destigmatize academic support, which appeared to facilitate students' productive relationships with Mrs. Compass.

These findings also suggest that the way teachers enact certain practice may look different based on the teacher's content area and that while it is preferable for teachers to interact with students both inside and outside the classroom, there are ways they can still build relationships with students within the confines of their classroom. However, teachers must be intentional about incorporating relational practices into their classrooms

that also compliment the instructional demands of their content areas. The teachers in the study were adept at finding small ways to acknowledge students and creating small moments of individual connection with students to ensure they got to know their students and could meet their students' needs both within and beyond the instructional space. These findings suggest that no matter what the instructional role of a teacher may be, they can work within it to build relationships, but they must learn how to do so deliberately.

Implications

In this section, I address implications for this work on both a theoretical and a practical level. I begin with the theoretical implications of the study. Then I discuss the practical applications of this work as they pertain to teacher education and professional development as well as school structures.

Theoretical implications.

In this section, I discuss the theoretical implication of this study. I argue that the findings from this study align with the conceptual framework proposed for this research, which suggests that when preparing teachers to initiate and maintain working alliances with Black male students, they must consider how to modify practices based on dimensions of their identity and enact practices through a lens of politicized care.

***Initiating a working alliance with Black male adolescents*.** Within educational settings, relationships are essential elements of the student experience, but not all relationships are equally productive and supportive (Howard, 2014; Love, 2013; Sleeter, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Wilson, 2016). While students and teachers can have strong interpersonal bonds, these bonds alone do not form a productive relationship. For school-based relationships to be productive they must move students toward academic

and socio-emotional development (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2000; Harper et al., 2014; Howard, 2014; Reichert & Hawley, 2014; Warren, 2013). This assertion expresses the underlying premise of both a praxis of politicized care and working alliance theory. Working alliance theory provides a worthwhile framework by which to study the overarching structure of a functioning student-teacher relationship that moves beyond an interpersonal bond, yet working alliance theory does not take into consideration how race and other dimensions of a teacher's identity as well as the race and gender of the student impact the progression and nature of the working alliance.

In the conceptual framework for this study, I suggest that when considering how teachers initiate and maintain relationship with their Black male students, working alliance theory provides a useful framework that situates the relationship as having a larger purpose. However, I argue that an interpersonal bond cannot be developed with Black male adolescents if the teacher takes a color and gender blind approach to the relationship (Dance 2012). Black male youth must believe that their teachers recognize their racial identity and understand their racial realities and at the same time that their teachers see them as individuals rather than as stereotypes. Thus, a praxis of politicized care must be embedded within the conceptualization of a working alliance with Black male students both as a foundational element to the relationship and as a mechanism to support the maintenance of the relationship over time.

Additionally, the four layers of diversity model (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994) suggests that when people work together in diverse settings they must approach interactions with an understanding about how similarities and differences in their dimensions of identity can facilitate or constrain their interactions with others. Thus, a

teacher's identity also influences the formation of the working alliance with Black male adolescents as visible dimensions of the teacher's identity such as race and gender can either facilitate the relationship or create barriers that must be worked through. When attempting to initiate and maintain relationships with their Black male students, teachers must consider how their worldviews and prior experiences influence their perceptions of Black male adolescents and how their race, gender, and institutional role may influence how they are initially perceived by their Black male students. As the relational manager in the working alliance, the teacher must take responsibility for maintaining the relationship and navigating any tensions that arise (Rogers, 2009), which may require that the teacher modify relational practices to account for their race, gender, and institutional role.

Thus, I conceptualize the working alliance with Black male students as being anchored by the tenets of politicized care and extend the notion of politicized care beyond the practice of Black female educators to consider how it may be expressed differently by teachers of other races and genders.

Practical implications.

Teacher education programs and K-12 schools need to prioritize the continuing development of teachers' cultural competence. The findings from this study suggest that a teacher's race and to some extent their gender influence how they develop productive relationships with Black male students. However, other dimension of a teacher's identity such as their institutional role as well as their self-efficacy, cultural awareness, and empathy appear to have a greater influence on their ability to initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students. Thus while a teacher's internal

dimensions of identity such as their race and gender may influence the way they approach relationships with Black male adolescents, a teacher's ability to engage in productive relationships with Black male students is determined more by other external factors, such as cultural awareness, which can be developed over time.

Therefore, it is important that teacher education and professional development programs prioritize the development of these perspectives and skills for all teachers, including those teachers who are not currently teaching or who are not intentionally seeking to teach in schools that are primarily attended by students of color. Corby High School provides a concrete example of the growing racial diversity in U.S. schools. As the U.S. student population continues to become increasingly diverse, the U.S. teaching force remains predominately White and female. In addition, while many schools of education have begun to place a greater emphasis on preparing teachers to work in a more diverse society; many veteran teachers have not had this preparation. Additionally, many private and parochial secondary schools like Corby, hire teachers based on their content mastery and do not necessarily require that they have a degree in education. Thus, it is important that this issue not only be addressed in teacher education programs but also be a primary focus of professional development within schools.

That said, professional development that focuses on cultural awareness and culturally responsive practices should not be structured as a one-time or a one size fits all program. Cultural competence is a continuum (Diller & Moule, 2005) and schools should differentiate their professional development to account for where different teachers are on that continuum. Some teachers may be unaware of their implicit bias, unwilling to admit the stereotypical assumptions they make about Black male adolescents and still clinging

to a color-blind approach to teaching. Other teachers may be aware of some of their implicit bias and how it affects students, but may be unsure of how to facilitate productive conversations about race in the classroom. Black male teachers may need support to help them form relationships with Black male students who have had experiences that are significantly different from their own or may need guidance on ways they can strategically support students' racial identity development. Additionally, this study suggests that teachers may need to take different approaches to relational practices based on how their dimensions of identity do or do not align with their students. Thus it is important that professional development programs specifically address this aspect of relationship formation and go beyond providing a simple introduction to cultural diversity for all teachers.

While the focal teachers in this study, particularly Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass, seemed to be already inclined to address the needs of their Black male students, this may not always be the case with all teachers. It is important that teacher education and professional development programs provide opportunities and supports for teachers to gain a greater awareness of their Black male students' realities and to reflect on how they are meeting the needs of their Black male students. The findings from this study, particular those in reference to Mr. Fitzgerald, suggest there are a variety of ways in which teachers can begin to effectively develop cultural competence including reading works by authors of color to gain a variety of different perspectives, having opportunities to observe and learn from other teachers, having opportunities to reflect on their own teaching and lived experience, and having meaningful cross-cultural experiences. These methods may not be sufficient for changing the mindset of all teachers, especially those

with ingrained racist beliefs, but they can perhaps begin to slowly move the needle for a large subset of teachers whose biased beliefs and actions may be driven by ignorance or a lack of experience with students from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

School administrators should also bear in mind that the purpose of investing in development of teachers' cultural competence is so that teachers will take a more empathetic view of their students, be able to comfortably engage in conversations about race, have tools to navigate tensions with their Black male students when they arise, and ultimately be able to consistently affirm and support their Black male students. As such, teachers' views about students of color, in this case particularly Black male students, should be directly assessed in the interview process, and the extent to which teachers successfully establish productive relationships with students across demographic groups, in this case specifically with their Black male students, should be included as part of the criteria for teacher evaluation. These types of evaluations may help teachers to reflect on and adapt their practices to be more supportive of their Black male students and may also help to screen out teachers who are steadfast in their racist beliefs. It is only in this way that school systems as a whole can uphold the humanity of Black male students.

Schools also need to ensure that they continue to develop teacher's cultural competence over time and pay particular attention to this type of training in schools that are experiencing significant shifts in their racial demographics. This continued professional development is particularly necessary, since teacher education programs typically take a broader approach to preparing teachers to work with culturally diverse students rather than focusing in on the specific needs of certain student populations. It is important that schools continue to invest in the development of teachers' cultural

competence by specifically concentrating on practices that are potentially effective for the specific student populations represented in that school community.

Schools need to prioritize the hiring of diverse staff, particularly the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers. Currently Black male teachers make up only two percent of the U.S. teaching force (Morris, 2014). While all teachers regardless of race or gender can form productive relationships with Black male adolescents (Brockenbrough, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Toldson, 2013), teachers from different racial and socio-economic backgrounds may offer students access to different types of capital. In particular, Black teachers can provide their Black male students with navigational capital, which Yosso (2005), defines as" the skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (p.80). This study among others finds that Black male teachers are a vital support for Black male students particularly during the middle and high school years when students become more aware of their racial identity (Brooms, 2019; Cross et al., 1999; Fergus et al., 2014; McKinney de Royston, 2017). Therefore, both teacher education programs and K-12 schools need to continue to recruit Black male teachers and to retain them in the profession. Additionally, the field should emphasize the need for Black male teachers within a variety of school types, not just in urban schools where the study body is composed of primarily students of color. Black male adolescents in more racially and socio-economically diverse schools need teachers who look like them and who can help them to navigate school spaces where they might face micro-aggressions from teachers who compare them to their White peers, face racial discrimination from peers, or be more cognizant of oppressive institutional structures such as tracking.

Additionally, K-12 schools should not only focus on recruiting Black men as teachers but should also prioritize the recruitment of Black men into administrative and school support positions, particularly counseling. Black male teachers are often burdened with taking on disciplinary or quasi-counseling duties for Black male students even when these duties fall outside of their job description, and this extra work can frequently lead to Black male teachers burning out and leaving the profession. If schools employed more Black male counselors and administrators, it may ease the burden on Black male teachers and help them to stay in the profession.

Relational practices must be modified based on the dimension of teacher's personal identity. Teacher education programs need to spend more time prioritizing relational practices, yet they cannot present these practices as a one size fits all approach. Teacher educators must provide their participants with multiple visions of how relational practices can be enacted and explicitly explain why and how teachers may need to modify these practices given the dimensions of their identity and how their identity positions them in relation to their students. In teacher education courses that focus on race, identity, and teachers' cultural awareness, teachers are often asked to reflect on their identity and how their race and worldview have shaped their perspectives about teaching, learning, and working with diverse students. While this is a necessary exercise, teacher education programs need to also address how relationally effective and culturally relevant practices can and should be enacted differently given the teacher's social location in the classroom. For example, I found that for White teachers to have meaningful conversation about race in the classroom, they must first establish trust with their students by establishing themselves as an ally and support for their Black male students. Unlike their

Black colleagues, they needed to demonstrate through their words and action an empathy for their Black male students before students can authentically engage in conversations around race. Similarly, as a Black male, I found Mr. Nelson was able to connect with his students through a shared and familiar communication style. However, this style was authentic to who Mr. Nelson was and how he naturally communicated. Had a White teacher adjusted their communication style to reflect that of their students, it would have been both offensive and inauthentic and as a result may have created a barrier to building an interpersonal relationship rather than facilitating one as it did in the case of Mr. Nelson. Thus, while Black educators offer valuable models of how to build productive relationships with Black males students, White teachers must have a clear understanding of how the implementation of these practices can and should be nuanced based on the teacher's identity in particular their race.

Relational practices must be taught alongside instructional practices. In addition to considering the influence dimensions of a teacher's identity have on relational practices, teachers must also consider how relational practices intersect with instructional practices within their content areas. Often the only courses in teacher education programs that directly address the importance of relationships are more general education classes such as classroom management or courses on race, culture and identity. These courses frequently name relationships as a foundational aspect of effective teaching but do not break down what a productive relationship should look like or how teachers can form and maintain such relationships with students especially when tensions arise or when students are initially hesitant to engage with the teacher.

Additionally, many novice teachers equate good relationships with an interpersonal bond based on kindness and sentimental care, but they do not yet recognize that true care also requires an insistence that students learn, so they will be prepared for the future (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Gay, 2000; Roberts, 2010). Teacher education programs must help teacher candidates recognize that their role is not only to form meaningful interpersonal relationships with students but also to build productive working alliances that will lead to the students' academic development and future success.

Teacher preparation programs must incorporate the elements of effective relational teaching into all of their courses and provide teacher candidates with specific visions of how they can use their curriculum and pedagogy to reinforce relationships. For example, Mr. Fitzgerald very intentionally chose structures in his classroom that led to relationship building: an independent reading program, writing assignments that prioritized students' personal knowledge, and texts and discussion questions that engaged students in meaningful conversations. However, even if a teacher adopts these structures, they will not necessarily lead to stronger student-teacher relationships if the teacher does not understand how to utilize these structures to inform their ongoing interactions with students. These are skills that can and should be explicitly taught as part of teachers' content level coursework.

Schools must consider how their policies and structures impact teachers' ability to engage in productive relationships with their Black male students. Regardless of a school's structure, willing teachers can establish productive relationships with their Black male students. However, schools' policies, procedures, and structures can facilitate or create barriers to productive student-teacher relationships. Several structures at Corby

High School made it easier for the focal teachers to initiate and maintain productive relationships with their Black male students. These structures can provide insight about policies or structures that other K-12 schools can adopt to help facilitate improved relationships between their teachers and their Black male students.

First, Corby facilitated the teachers' ability to form productive relationships with their Black male students by giving teachers some control over their curriculum, the materials they used in class, and their course structure. At Corby, teachers had the freedom to develop their curriculum, which allowed them to make instructional decisions that took into consideration the specific needs and interests of the students in their particular classes. On Corby's website under program of study, it describes this philosophy stating, "These descriptions [of courses] are skeletons that teachers and students will flesh out and bring to life over the term of the course." However, the professional autonomy afforded to teachers at Corby is often not the case in most K-12 schools. Instead, teachers must follow in lock step a standardized, scripted curriculum, which limits their ability to make students' active participants in their own learning and address students' individual needs and interests and can at times even cause teachers to lower their expectations for Black male students. While standards are important to ensure students are receiving rigorous instruction, at the very least, school district leaders and administrators should give teachers the professional freedom to modify the curriculum to meet the specific needs and interests of their students.

Second, productive student-teacher relationships are supported when students have some choice over the teachers they have and the courses they take. While students at Corby had core classes they were required to take to graduate, they also had some choice

over their class selection especially in their junior and senior years. According to Corby High School's course catalog, students options for classes included senior English seminars on Crime & Detective Fiction, Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, and African American Literature, history electives such as the African American Experience and Understanding 9-11 as well as a plethora of other courses including multiple art and music classes, forensic science, economics, psychology, personal finance, robotics, and many more. Since students had the opportunity to choose some of their courses, they were given control to select a class whose content was of interest and/or to elect to take a class from a teacher of their choosing.

Findings from this study suggest that when students voluntarily entered instructional spaces such as was the case with Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Compass, there appeared to be less tension with teachers. Additionally, it appeared many students took art because they wanted to be in Mr. Nelson's presence and felt his classroom was more culturally familiar. Thus, course selection allows students to opt into spaces where they feel most comfortable and for Black male students in schools where Black male teachers are scarce, it may provide them with the opportunity for greater engagement with the Black male faculty. Therefore, schools can help facilitate productive student-teacher relationships between their faculty and Black male students by allowing students to have some control over both the courses they take and their teachers.

Third, Black males are more likely to engage in productive relationship with teachers when schools provide opportunities for students and teachers to engage both inside and outside the classroom and to have continued interaction across multiple semesters and multiple years. As students get older, their time with individual teachers

becomes shorter as they tend to only have a teacher for one period over the course of one semester or one year. This situation is particularly true in larger high schools. Unlike in elementary school where a teacher may be with students for the majority of the day and as result end up spending some unstructured down time with their students on most days, in high school this type of informal interaction is often not the case. However, the findings from this study highlight the importance of these more informal interactions as a means for teachers to get to know their students as people, provide them with life advice, and for students to seek guidance. Therefore, it is important that secondary schools provide unstructured opportunities for students and teachers to interact.

Additionally, findings from this study suggest students are more willing to ask for help when they feel a level of comfortable with someone that can only be established over time. For example, many students often went to Mrs. Compass for academic support rather than to their current teachers because they felt she knew them better and had a greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. This finding highlights the importance of students having a steady and stable presence throughout their high school careers. This may be especially important for Black male students in schools were the vast majority of teachers are White as it may take them more time to establish trust with their White teachers. Thus, it is important for schools to consider how they can provide students with opportunities to interact with the same school staff members across multiple years.

I also found that students built stronger relationship with teachers when they interacted with them both inside and outside the classroom. For instance, Mrs. Compass strengthened her relationships with students by supporting them at events such as sport

games, music concerts, and the play. Her presence at these events sent a message that she was invested in students and provided her an easy way to engage with students about topics other than academics. Likewise, Mr. Nelson's involvement in school activities such as the BSU, retreats, and service trips allowed him an opportunity to get to know students before he had them in class, which laid a foundation for a working relationship to form quickly when they did enroll in his art class. Since it is beneficial for students to have opportunities to interact with teachers in multiple venues and across multiple years, schools need to encourage teachers to become more active members of the school community, which they can do by ensuring teachers have manageable workloads.

Finally, findings from this study also suggest that a test-driven culture that is primarily focused on external markers of achievement such as test scores and GPAs can create a barrier for teachers who want to establish productive relationships with their Black male students. In art class where there was less pressure to get a high grade or in academic support where there were no grades given, students expressed feeling less pressure and less tension with the teacher and demonstrated a greater willingness to take risks. Students in these spaces did not put forth less effort, but they did experience less anxiety. Mr. Fitzgerald was able to somewhat mitigate these tensions and student anxieties through the opportunities he provided students for redemption points, which gave students some agency over their grades. While productive student-teacher relationships must ultimately lead to learning, it is important to consider how the high stakes culture of our school system may in fact detract from productive student-teacher relationships since Black male adolescents are perhaps less engaged in classrooms where they experience contentious relationships with the teacher (Irvine, 2009).

Limitations

While the findings from this collective case study inform the field of teacher education and professional development regarding how teachers can be prepared and supported in initiating and maintaining productive student-teacher relationships with Black male students, there are some limitations to the study.

The original intent of this study was to examine teachers' relational practices with Black male students across a variety of school sites. However, given limitations of both time and access, I focused on only one school site. The single school site model as well as the unique nature of the school, an all-boys parochial school, created some limitations for the generalizability of the findings. Situating the study in an all-boys parochial school, allowed me to get clear insight on the phenomena of interest within this specific context; however, this specific context differs from the types of schools that the majority of Black male adolescents attend in both the metropolitan areas where Corby is located as well as in the nation as a whole.

Additionally, parochial schools operate under a different set of priorities, policies and structures than many public schools; therefore, some of the findings in this study may not be applicable in schools where teachers' roles are governed by a different set of policies and expectations. At Corby, students' moral formation and the development of a sense of community were core tenets of the school's mission. Thus, the school administration expected teachers to build relationship with students and invest in students beyond just their academic development. Also teachers in Catholic schools typically have more control over their curriculum than do teachers in public schools. Given these

different elements of Catholic school teachers' work, some of the findings may be difficult to generalize to other school contexts.

Furthermore, since this study took place in an all-boys school, I was unable to observe how teachers' relationships and interactions with their Black male students compared to their relationships and interactions with Black female students. As a result, the claims that teachers' relational practices differ based on a student's gender are tentative.

A second limitation of the study is the selection of student participants. While each teacher interacted with dozens of students each day, due to the primacy of student interviews in the study, and the limitation of time, as well as the obstacles encountered gaining parental consent for minors, I chose to only interview two to three focal students per teacher. While the senior exit surveys that were used to identify the focal teachers helped to ensure these students' perspectives were not an anomaly, the inclusion of focus groups or student surveys could have supplemented the more in depth interviews and allowed me to provide a more global perspective of the teachers' relational strategies with their Black male students.

I also only explored the relational practices of the focal teachers and their Black male students. Because I did not include student participants from any other racial demographic, it is difficult to make a strong claim that the relational practices the teachers employed were especially significant for Black male student rather than simply effective relational practice for all students. I did have the opportunity to ask the teachers and students about why and if they felt the practices the focal teachers employed were especially significant for Black male students, but this did not provide the same level of

insight that a comparison group would have. If I had interviewed students at the school who identified with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, I may have been able to draw a clearer distinction between the teachers' relational practices that were generally effective in contrast to those that were specifically effective for forming relationship with Black male adolescents.

Finally, the purpose of case study research is to develop a rich description of a case or cases. In order to create this in-depth understanding of a case, a significant amount of time must be spent collecting and analyzing data for each case. Therefore, I chose to focus on a smaller number of cases, so I could devote the time needed to develop an in-depth understanding of each case, but the small sample size for this study makes the findings less generalizable. Additionally, while I chose a purposeful sample so that no two teachers embodied the same combination of racial and gender identities, all three teachers fell within the Black/White binary. Thus, while the findings may shed light on how White and Black teachers may need to adjust their relational practices based on their racial identity, the findings do not account for how other teachers of color may need to adjust or adapt these practices when working with Black male students.

Although I had originally recruited four teachers to participate in the study, and conducted an initial interview and observation with a fourth participant, a Black female teacher, due to scheduling issues and problems consenting the focal students in her class, I was unable to complete a full data set for the fourth teacher. Consequently, I did not include her data in my analysis for this study. I believe had I been able to collect all of the data for this fourth teacher and include that additional data in the full study, I would have

been able to make stronger claims about the separate ways both gender and race impact teachers' relational practices with Black male students.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study confirm that teachers who initiate and maintain effective student-teacher relationships with Black male students can be an important lever for engaging Black male students in productive relationships and encouraging them to invest in school. Thus, it is important that researchers continue to develop a strong understanding of the relational practices that are effective with Black male adolescents and the ways in which teachers can be supported in developing those practices. Therefore, future research should be conducted in the following areas:

Explore whether the relationally effective practices identified in this study are equally successful in racially diverse public and charter schools as well as in co-ed Catholic and private schools.

Findings from this study suggest that the focal teachers' ability to establish productive relationships with their Black male students can be partially attributed to the ethos of Corby High School as well as the freedom teachers were provided by the administration. The administration at Corby was both encouraging and supportive of teachers developing strong productive relationships with students since this practice aligned with the school's emphasis on community. Additionally, the teachers had the opportunity to make choices about the content and structure of their instructional spaces, which allowed them to make the decisions they felt would best support their Black male students. Research that explores how teachers build relationships with Black male students when they do not have this same administrative support and these same

freedoms could provide a more generalizable list of practices that could be implemented in more structured and standardized school environments. Additionally, the focal teachers felt they were able to at times easily hold upfront conversation about issues that specifically pertained to male students or Black male students because of the absence of female students in their classrooms, thus it would be important to see how teachers still make room for these types of conversation within co-ed school environments.

Expand this study to explore how teachers initiate and maintain relationship with students from different racial and gender demographics.

In this study, while I questioned students and teachers about how they felt teachers adapted their practices to meet the specific needs of their Black male students; I was not able to confirm that these practices were in fact specific to Black male students as I did not investigate teachers practices with students of different races nor did I solicit the perspectives of students from other racial demographics. A study designed around a more comparative analysis would allow researchers to draw more definitive conclusions about the specific ways teachers adapt their relational practices to meet the specific needs of their Black male students and provide insight into whether in fact the relational needs of Black male students are unique to this particular student population.

Examine how teacher education programs prepare teachers to embed relationally effective practices within the content and instructional practices that are specific to their content area.

The findings from this study, particularly those surrounding Mr. Fitzgerald's practice, suggest that relational and instructional practices are not mutually exclusive but instead can reinforce one another. In this study, Mr. Fitzgerald was able to use the

content, activities, and assignments in his English class as a vehicle for building relationships with his Black male students. Yet within teacher education programs relational and instructional practices are often taught as two distinct entities rather than taught in tandem. Thus, it is important for future research to explore the ways that teachers in different content areas learn to use their curriculum and content as levers for building relationships.

Explore the relational practices of other teachers of color with Black male students to get a better understanding of the impact of race on relational practices.

One limitation of the current study is that I explored how Black and White teachers modified relational practices to account for their racial identity and how it positioned them in the classroom with their Black male students. However, this study did not explore how other teachers of color, who do not share the same racial background as their Black male students, build relationship with Black male adolescents. In order to ensure that all teachers are prepared to build effective relationships with Black male students it is important to gain a broader perspective on the barriers and assets that teachers from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds bring to these relationships.

Explore how teacher education programs and school professional development programs differentiate support for teachers on enacting relationally effective practices with Black male students.

As indicated in the finding for this study, teachers of different races and genders may enact relationally effective practices in different ways. Additionally, it appeared that teachers with different life experiences and level of cultural competence would also benefit from more differentiated support. While this study established the need for

differentiated support, it does not establish how the need for differentiate supports can be assessed or how differentiated supports should be structured. Thus future research should look to identify and evaluate specific differentiated practices that can be implemented to support teachers' development of relationships with their Black male students, and the extent to which these supports effectively change teachers' beliefs and actions as they interact with Black male students.

Conclusion

Black male students have been traditionally underserved and are frequently mistreated within U.S. schools. While this phenomenon has been well documented in urban racially homogenous schools, it has often been overlooked in more racially and socioeconomically diverse schools. As the racial diversity of the U.S. student population continues to increase, it is important that we remain committed to preparing novice teachers and supporting veteran teachers in their capacity to effectively initiate and maintain productive relationships with all their students, but particularly with their Black male students. A failure to do so will result in our schools remaining hostile environments for Black male youth.

The positive news is that this change is possible. Teachers of all races and genders can initiate and maintain productive student relationship with Black male students that can lead to learning and future success. However, the change depends on the will of teachers and school systems. Teachers must be willing to reflect on their own identities and to adjust and adapt their practices to embody a praxis of politicized care. School systems must be committed to the development and evaluation of teachers' cultural competence and relational practices and must be willing to dismiss teachers who are

harmful for Black male students. Additionally, school systems must commit to recruiting more teachers of color, especially Black men, so they can diversify the profession and improve the school experiences of all students, but particularly Black male adolescents. The productive relationships that the students experienced with the focal teachers in this study should be the norm not the exception to the rule.

Appendix A: Table of Empirical Literature on Teacher Relationships with Black Male Students

Source	Purpose of Study/ Research Questions	Educator Demographics	Student Participant Demographics	Context/ School Demographics	Data Sources
Allen, Q. (2015). Race, culture, and agency. Examining the ideologies and practices of U.S. teachers of Black male teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 47, 71-81.	**Purpose:** Examine the ideologies and practices of teachers of Black male highlighting the ways they think and talk about Black male students using structural and cultural explanations for their school outcomes.	3 White females teachers 2 Black females 1 Black male	Black males	Suburban High School in Western US Middle & working class Racially diverse population: 29% Black 28% Asian 19% Latino 11% White 13% Other	Student interviews Parent interviews Teacher interviews Observations
Brockenbrough, E. (2014). Further mothering: Reconceptualizing white women educators' work with Black youth. *Equity & Excellence in Education,* 47 (3), 253-272.	To provide a framework by which to name and explore successful culturally responsive White women educators and youth of color especially Black youth.	5 Queer Black men 2 Queer White women	Queer male and transgender females who identify as Black. Ages 16-22	Urban nonprofit Mid-size Northeastern city.	Staff interviews Student interviews Observations
Brooms, D.R. (2019). "I was just trying to make it": Examining urban Black males' sense of belonging, school experience, and academic success. *Urban Education*, 54 (6), 804-830.	Research Questions: 1: How do Black male students understand and articulate their educational experiences at Douglass Academy? 2: How do they account for their success in matriculating from Douglass to their respective	Unspecified.	Black male post- secondary students	Urban all-boys charter high school. All African-American	Retrospective student interviews

	college campuses? Key Finding: school culture and relationships key contributors to student success.				
Brooms, D. R. (2017). Black otherfathering in the educational experience of Black males in a single-sex urban high school. *Teachers College Record*, 119, 1-46.	The purpose of this study was to understand Black male students' experiences in an all-male learning environment, with a particular emphasis on the role of Black male adults in their schooling experiences. (p.1)	Black males	Black male post-secondary students	Urban all-boys charter high school All African American	Retrospective student interviews
Canton, M.T. (2012). Black male perspectives on their educational experiences in high school. Urban Education, 47 (6), 1055-1085.	Purpose: To examines the impact of the zero-tolerance policies on Black males' educational experiences and outcomes.	Unspecified	10 Black males who had dropped out of high school within the last year 17-20 years old.	Urban high schools	Student interviews
Duncan, G.A. (2002). Beyond love: A critical race ethnography of the schooling of adolescent black males. *Equity & Excellence*, *35* (2), 131-143.	"The article examines the different stories that students, teachers, and administrators use to explain the marginalizatio n and exclusion of black male students at CHS and	Black female principal White male assistant principal White female assistant principal 7 Black teachers 10 White	Black males High school	Midwestern urban magnet school Very few Black males enrolled	Student interviews & focus groups Observations

	identifies their points of conflict that in part help to sustain these conditions of oppression" (p. 131).	teachers			
Fergus, E., Noguera, P., & Martin, M. (2014). Schooling for resilience: Improving the life trajectory of Black and Latino boys. Harvard Education Press.	"To analyze the ways the seven schools implicitly addressed three important questions: 1. To what degree were schools aware that they might be providing their students with knowledge and skills that would be likely to reproduce their respective places in a labor force stratified by class, race, and gender. 2. To what degree did these schools deliberately seek to provide students with forms of knowledge that might make it possible for them to critique and resist the dominant culture so that they might be able to subvert the tendency to reproduce their place within the class	Unspecified	Black & Latino males	7 single sex schools: Private Public Charter All in "inner-city" neighborhood Student populations between 54-99.8% Black	Interviews & focus groups with students, parents, school staff. Artifacts Observations Student surveys

	structure? 3. Given that schools are part of the apparatus of the state, to what degree were educators willing to take risks to challenge state policies that might be perceived as contributing to reproductive tendencies within schools?				
Flennaugh, T. (2017). "Life skills": A single-sex classroom intervention for Black boys transitioning from middle school to high school. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research,* 13, 53-62.	Research Questions 1) How do Black boys make sense of their experiences in the Life Skills class, specifically within a broader context of their high school? 2) What can we learn from the voices of Black boys about how the components of the Life Skills class hold promise for impacting their schooling experiences as they transition from middle school to high school?	1 Black male teacher	All Black boys 9th grade "Life Skills" class.	Urban school district in San Francisco Bay Area. Diverse overall student population: 34% Hispanic 23% Filipino 22% Asian 8% African American 6% White	Student interviews

Harper, S.R. & Associates (2014). Succeeding in the city: A report from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.	To provide recommendations for student success aimed at parents and families, urban high school teachers, high school guidance counselors, principals and other high school leaders, and postsecondary professionals and leaders.	Not specified	325 Black & Latino males High school juniors & seniors 90 Black & Latino Male undergrads	New York City	Student interviews
Howard, T.C. (2014). Black Male (d): Peril and promise in the education of African American males. Teachers College Press.	Research Questions: "How do you [Black male] describe how you are doing academically? What can schools do to improve outcomes for Black male students? What can Black males do to improve their academic achievement? What do you think school personnel and society most misunderstand about Black males?" (p.91)	Not specified	Black males 4 middle schools 4 high school	Urban & suburban schools	Student interviews

Hunter, J.G. & Stinson, D. W. (2019). A mathematics classroom of caring among a Black male teacher and Black male students. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 21 (1/2), 21-34.	To uncover the definition the Black male high school student had of teacher care & how, if at all, a Black male mathematics teacher might influence their perception of teacher care.	African American male	3 African American male High School Students	"Inner City" all male African-American public charter school in	Observation Teacher Interview Student Interviews
Jackson, I. Sealey- Ruiz, Y. & Watson, W. (2014). Reciprocal Love: mentoring Black and Latino males trough an ethos of cared. *Urban Education*, 49 (4), 394-417.	(a) How do the young men and mentor, as participants, experience UMOJA? (b) Which features of the mentoring program most contribute to the academic, social, and emotional growth of the members?	Black male	Black & Latino males alternate high school students	UMOJA Network for Young Men, an all-male mentoring program designed to develop the academic and social skills of over-age and under-credited Black and Latino youth	Observation Mentor Interviews Student Focus Group Interviews
Lynn, M., Bacon, J.N., Totten, T.L., Bridges, T.I., & Jennings, M. (2010). Examining teacher beliefs about African American male students in a low performing high school in an African American school district. *Teachers College Record, 112* (1), 289-330.	Research Questions: (1) How does a low-performing high school in a low-performing school district cope with the persistent problem of African American male underachievement? (2) In particular, how do teachers and administrators understand the problem? (3) How might this impact their ability to	Administrators (black female, 2 black males) Teachers (2 White females, 8 Black males, 40 Black females)	African American boys	Majority African American suburban county	Teacher & administrator interviews & focus groups.

	work successfully with African American male students?				
Ferguson, A.A. (2001). Bad boys: Public schools and the making of Black masculinity. University of Michigan Press.	To examine how schools "create, shape, and regulate" Black boys social identities (p.20.	20 White teachers 9 African American teachers 3 Asian American teachers ** 3 of the above teachers were male (one African American; others' races unspecified	20 5th & 6th grade African American boys	City 1/2 Black, 1/3 White, 10% Asian American, 4% Hispanic, 8 % Other	Student interviews Observations
McKinney de Royston, M.M., Vakil, S., Nasir, N.S., Ross, K.M., Givens, J., & Holman, A. (2017). "He's more like a 'brother' than a teacher": Politicized caring in a program for African American males. *Teacher College Record*, 119, 1-40.	What characterizes the teacher–student relationships within the all-Black, all-male classes of this district-sponsored program? Moreover, how do the instructors for the program enact these characteristics in their classrooms?	Black males	African American males Middle school/High school	Oakland Manhood Development Program	Instructor interviews Student interviews
Nelson, J.D. (2016). Relational teaching with black boys: Strategies for learning at single-sex middle school for boys of color. *Teachers College Record*, 118 (6), 1-30.	*(*1) Illustrate how a set of relational teaching strategies supported Black boys' engagement and learning, and (2) further contribute boys' "voice" to a counter-	50/50 split of male and female teachers 54% White 31% Black 15% Latino	8th grade Black male student	Independent school serving boys of color in grades 4-8. Students recruited from areas of highest level of poverty.	Student interviews

	narrative, which strives to complicate and dispel negative race and gender stereotypes associated with Black males in the United States.				
Warren, C. A. (2013). The utility of empathy for White female teachers' culturally responsive interactions with Black male students. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, *3* (3), 175 – 200.	Research Question: What is the utility of empathy for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with their Black male students? (p. 180).	White female teachers	Black male high school juniors & seniors.	Fringes of a Midwestern city – majority African American school district that had experienced a recent demographic shift.	Teacher interviews Student focus group interviews Observations
Warren, C.A. & Bonilla, C. (2018). Care and the influence of student-adult stakeholder interaction on young Black men's college aspirations. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 20 (1), 13-24.	The purpose of the article is to examine young Black men's descriptions of their interactions with adult stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, professional support staff, etc.), and the influence of those interactions on shaping their ambition to attend college.	Unspecified	Black male high school students	Urban single-sex charter school	Student Interviews

Watson, W., Sealey-Ruiz, Y., & Jackson, I. (2016). Daring to care: The role of culturally relevant care in mentoring Black and Latino male high school students. *Race Ethnicity & Education*, *19* (5), 980-1002.	Research Question: What are the experiences of the mentor and Black and Latino male participants in an all-male, school-based mentoring program? How are these experiences mediated? The data informed our thinking about the relationships between Black and Latino male students and their mentor and one another as involving culturally relevant care (p.982).	Black male	Black & Latino males alternate high school students	UMOJA Network for Young Men, an all-male mentoring program designed to develop the academic and social skills of over-age and under-credited Black and Latino youth	Observation Mentor Interviews Student Focus Group Interviews
Woodward, B. (2018). Centering the voice of Black male urban high school students on effective student teacher classroom relationships. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, 14, 63-72.	Research Questions: (a) What are factors that either impede or strengthen a classroom relationship between students and teachers? (b) What role does race play in fostering student-teacher relationships? (c) By providing voice to students, what can teachers learn about ways to enrich both their relationship and pedagogy?	Unspecified	Student interviews	3 urban high schools Large metropolitan county in Western U.S.	

Total # of Studies		Black Females: 10% Black Males: 45% White Females: 16% White Male: 0 % Unspecified: 35%		Suburban: 15% Urban: 80% Both: 5% Schools: 40% Districts:20% Nonprofits: 20% Multiple schools: 20% Majority or all Students of Color : 65%* *Several studies did not include a breakdown of racial demographics.	

Appendix B: Teacher Initial Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and for being willing to take time to speak with me today as I know you have many other demands on your time. This consent form defines your rights as a study participant and my responsibilities as the researcher. I particularly want to emphasize that as stated on the form your participation in this research is voluntary and you can stop participating at any time. Additionally, any information you provide will be kept confidential and reported using a pseudonym. Please take a minute to read over the consent form and let me know if you have any questions. If you have no questions, please sign this copy of the consent from and keep the other copy for your records.

You have been asked to participate in this study because Black male students from your previous classes identified you as a teacher who was particularly effective at building relationship with them that supported them both personally and academically. Today I would like to talk to you about your personal and professional background, your teaching philosophy, and your experience as an educator of Black males.

1) Tell me a little bit about yourself.

   a) *What brought you to _____ school?*

   b) *Can you describe your own schooling experience?*

   c) *Why did you decide to become a teacher?*

      i. *What preparation did you receive for this role?*

   d) *How long have you been teaching?*

      i. *At this school?*

      ii. *At this age level?*

      iii. *Where if anywhere did you teach prior to coming to _____?*

2) What do you enjoy most about teaching?

   a) *What is the most important thing you want students to take away from their experience in your class?*

3) What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of being a teacher?

   a) *What is the most challenging part of working with your students*?

4) Overall, how would you describe your relationship with students?

a) *Can you describe a particularly meaningful relationship you have had with a student in your class?*

b) *Can you describe a particularly challenging relationship you have had with a student in the past?*

5) What do you think are the greatest challenges facing your Black male students?

a) *How do you think those challenges impact your students school experience?*

b) *How do you as a teacher try to help your students work through these challenges?*

6) On the senior exit surveys, you were recognized by several Black male students as a teacher who had a significant impact on them during their time at Corby High School, why do you think that was the case?

a) *Is cultivating relationship with your Black male students something you intentionally think about doing in your teaching?*

b) *In what ways, if at all, do your relationships with Black male students differ from your relationships with other students in your class*?

i. *Why do you think this is the case?*

Appendix C: Student Initial Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project and to speak with me today. You have already received and signed a form consenting to participate in this study, but I want to remind you before we start that your participation is voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time. All your responses will be kept confidential, and I will refer to you using a pseudonym in any written documents. Today I would like to learn a little bit about you, and talk with you about your school experience and your views on Teacher X.

1) Tell me a little bit about yourself.

a) *What grade are you currently in?*

b) *How long have you been attending Corby High School*?

i. *What brought you to Corby High School?*

c) *Can you describe the previous schools you have attended?*

d) *What are your interests outside of school? What extracurricular activities do you participate in?*

2) How would you describe yourself as a student?

a) *What are your greatest strengths as a student?*

b) *What classes do you typically do best in?*

c) *Are there any areas you want to improve on as a student?*

d) *Are there any classes or subjects that you find particularly challenging*?

3) How would you describe your typical interactions with your teachers?

a) *How do you think your teachers would describe you?*

b) *Can you describe a teacher with whom you had a particularly good relationship?*

c) *Can you describe a particular teacher you had a negative relationship or negative interaction with?*

i. *What caused the tensions in the relationship?*

4) How would you describe your overall school experience?

a) *What do you like best about school*?

b) *What do you like least?*

5) How would you describe an ideal relationship with a teacher?

a) *What would you want to get out of the relationship?*

b) *What expectations would you have of the teacher in the relationship?*

c) *How would the relationship make you feel?*

6) What were your first impressions of Teacher X?

a) *What did Teacher X do or say that made you think that?*

b) *What previous experiences had you had with Teacher X before taking his/her class?*

c) *What had you heard about Teacher X prior to taking his/her class/seeking their help?*

7) At this moment, how would you describe your relationship with Teacher X?

8) How does your relationship with Teacher X compare to your relationship with your other teachers?

a) *Why do you think your relationship with Teacher X is better/worse than your relationship with your other teachers?*

b) *Can you give me an example of something Teacher X does differently than your other teachers?*

9) Can you describe your typical interactions with Teacher X in any given day?

a) *What types of interactions do you have with Teacher X during class?*

b) *What types of interactions do you typically have with Teacher X outside of class?*

10) Can you describe any significant interactions you have had with Teacher X?

a) *Can you describe where those interactions occurred?*

b) *What was the nature or purpose of those interactions?*

Appendix D: Teacher Profiles

Mrs. Compass

"She's different," one student tells me. He uses the word different, but it seems that he and others are perhaps implying that she is better. As the academic support counselor Mrs. Compass has a breadth and depth of knowledge that is both acknowledged and admired by her students – regardless of the class or the question, she seems to be able to help. While students may be able to go to teachers with similar questions, they choose to go to Mrs. Compass because of her unwavering support and positivity. She puts time and effort into each student and becomes a consistent presence each year even as other teachers and subjects change. Unlike in perhaps other teachers' presence, the students who were with her rarely feel judged for being stupid or turned down when they request that something be re-explained. If a student doesn't get something the first time, she does not endlessly attempt to make them understand by repeating the same thing over and over – she looks to find new ways to explain or different entry points for understanding – she does not give up until the student feels comfortable with their work.

Mrs. Compass is not a pushover – there are clear expectations in her room and students are quickly re-directed if they step off task – but she is also not an authoritarian – the focus of the students in the room is a testament to the respect they accord her because of the respect she has given them. Many of the students who routinely make use of academic support are athletes. At a school that is known for its superb athletic program – in other facets of their life, their athletic talent can overshadow their academic accomplishments as they may be trapped and labeled under the typical stereotypes associated with the Black male athlete – but while Mrs. Compass acknowledges their athletic talents and supports them showing up at games to cheer them on - she views these students more holistically realizing the many talents they bring to the community and their innate potential to conquer whatever they set out to if they only put their mind to it and seek out the support that is available to them. Her belief that time and effort payoff is demonstrated by her availability and accessibility. If a student asks for help and wants to push their potential, Mrs. Compass will be right there with them whether it be at 6am in the morning or on a Sunday afternoon. She pushes students to ask for help, and affirms their asking by rarely saying no. The academic support room can at times be full of students needing assistance but despite this Mrs. Compass continues to make sure each student gets the assistance they need and that they feel seen. All of the students I spoke to don't need academic support to pass their classes, they want academic support to help them excel and to reach their highest potential. They are not there to eke out a C in a class but to push the B+ or A- to A. They are unwilling to settle for less than their best. They are there by choice and while at first they may have come because they felt lost in a class or overwhelmed by the demands of a new school– now, each senior I spoke to continues to voluntarily come almost every day because Mrs. Compass helps bring out the best in them.

Mr. Fitzgerald

Mr. Fitzgerald often seems serious and contemplative, but this is perhaps because he takes his job so seriously. Mr. Fitzgerald does his homework – he is well read, informed, and always prepared. His enthusiastic love of learning is made clear to students and passed on to the students through classroom structures such independent reading where he helps students rediscover the joys of reading for pleasure. There is rarely downtime in Mr. Fitzgerald's class as there is always something going on. Mr. Fitzgerald intentionally selects material that he feels will both engage and reflect the experiences of students. When he can, he creates opportunities for students to fully engage with the material through debates, relevant videos, or opportunities to write. Mr. Fitzgerald also creates a welcoming atmosphere in his classroom where students feel comfortable discussing issues that are important to them. Mr. Fitzgerald acknowledges the importance of students' voices and provides them an opportunity to be heard. Mr. Fitzgerald sincerely wants to hear what each student has to say and listens to their opinions without judgement. In addition, if issues arise in the class, Mr. Fitzgerald will listen and hear students out. He believes in the potential of each of his students, and students recognize and respond to the push he gives them to be their best.

Mr. Nelson

The word "vibe" is used multiple times to explain the culture in Mr. Nelson's room. Student tell me it just has a different "vibe" which they all attribute to the laidback and relaxed atmosphere of the art building, which is set off from the rest of the school and at times feels like a culture all its own. While all students describe Mr. Nelson as unique in his approach to students, others recognize that he is also unique in his Blackness, which is a stark contrast to the majority White faculty. In the art room, Mr. Nelson is known not to talk at students but to talk with them. Most instruction is done through demonstration and individualized feedback rather than lecture. While the students have the space to relax and create, Mr. Nelson dispenses grandfatherly advice on a wide array of topics from finances to dating to the lessons he has learned throughout his life. He does so with authenticity and candor – he trusts his students with his stories and they in turn trust him with theirs. Mr. Nelson is not only a teacher but a mentor someone students look up to and turn to when they need advice. It is not unusual for students to seek out the art room even when they do not have art class as a place to de-stress from the many other demands they have on their day. Mr. Nelson is described as an institution at the school – who is an asset to students and essential part of the experience

Appendix E: Within Case Codes Chart

	1st Cycle Open Process Codes		2nd Cycle Pattern Coding	Themes (Practices)
Mrs. Compass	1. Recognizing students' realities 2. Immersing oneself in the culture 3. Noticing & naming issues of race 4. Putting yourself in students' shoes 5. Breaking information down 6. Helping students understand 7. Knowing materials 8. Responding to students' needs 9. Preparing for the future 10. Being available 11. Being present 12. Listening 13. Placing yourself in proximity 14. Focusing on growth 15. Normalizing struggle 16. Encouraging 17. Being patient	18. Intruding intentionally 19. Learning from mistakes 20. Acknowledging effort 21. Avoiding judgement 22. Building community 23. Exuding positivity 24. Making students feel welcome 25. Recognizing students' humanity 26. Authentically engaging with students. 27. Enjoying students' company 28. Wanting the best for students 29. Empowering student 30. Celebrating students' successes 31. Pushing students to reach their potential 32. Setting high standards 33. Working to change perception	• Recognizing students' humanity • Authentically engaging with students. • Building community	***Interacting with students in a humanizing manner***
			• Being present • Listening • Being available • Celebrating students' successes • Exuding positivity • Avoiding judgement	***Being a consistent positive presence in students' lives.***
			• Acknowledging effort • Being patient • Learning from mistakes	***Taking an asset-based approach that prioritizes growth.***
			• Preparing for the future • Helping students understand • Knowing material • Pushing students to reach their potential • Setting high standards	***Preparing students for short and long term success***
			• Intruding intentionally • Placing yourself in proximity	***Engaging students as active participants in their own learning process***
			• Noticing & naming issues of race	***Noticing and naming race-based issues***

	1st Cycle Open Process Codes		2nd Cycle Pattern Coding	Themes (Practices)
Mr. Fitzgerald	1. Developing talent 2. Recognizing talent 3. Viewing students from an asset-based perspective 4. Knowing content 5. Putting in the effort 6. Getting to know students as people 7. Paying attention 8. Sharing common interest 9. Showing who you are 10. Creating connection 11. Honoring student voice 12. Empowering students 13. Hearing student perspective 14. Setting students up for success 15. Creating predictable routines	16. Establishing a tone in the classroom 17. Motivating students to push themselves 18. Providing feedback 19. Setting clear expectations 20. Working alongside 21. Working toward a common goal 22. Choosing relevant material 23. Engaging 24. Seeing things from students' point of view 25. Putting yourself in students' shoes 26. Allowing redemption 27. Holding high expectations 28. Affirming students 29. Being available 30. Establishing trust 31. Focusing on growth/progress	• Honoring student voice • Empowering students • Getting to know students as people • Paying attention • Developing talent • Recognizing talent	***Interacting with students in a humanizing manner.***
			• Allowing opportunities for redemption • Viewing students from an asset-based perspective	***Allowing opportunities for redemption***
			• Engaging • Working alongside • Choosing relevant material	***Engaging students as active participants in their own learning***
			• Holding high expectations • Creating predictable routines • Motivating students to push themselves • Setting clear expectations • Setting students up for success • Knowing material	***Preparing students for short & long-term success***
			• Putting yourself in students' shoes • Hearing students' perspective • Establishing a tone in the classroom • Establishing trust	***Creating a space for conversations about race.***

	1st Cycle Process Codes		2nd Cycle Pattern Codes	Themes (Practices)
Mr. Nelson	1. Paying attention 2. Creating a welcoming environment 3. Building community 4. Connecting to students' culture 5. Treating like family 6. Understanding students 7. Holding high standards 8. Holding students accountable 9. Pushing students to reach their potential 10. Authentically engaging with students 11. Being honest 12. Engaging 13. Being present 14. Being available 15. Guiding students 16. Addressing individual student needs	17. Modeling 18. Giving advice 19. Looking out for student's best interest 20. Focusing on growth 21. Acknowledging effort 22. Consulting with students on their progress 23. Engaging with students outside of class 24. Confronting racial issues 25. Discussing societal issues 26. Recognizing students' humanity 27. Appreciating multiple talents 28. Sharing his story 29. Being passionate about his craft 30. Continually improving	• Being honest • Confronting racial issues • Sharing his story • Discussing societal issues	***Transparency***
			• Being available • Being present • Engaging with students outside of class	***Actively participating in the school community.***
			• Paying attention • Welcoming environment • Building community • Connecting to students' culture • Treating like family • Engaging • Authentically engaging with students	***Interacting with students in a humanizing manner***
			• Guiding students • Giving advice • Looking out for students' best interest	***Mentoring students***
			• Holding high standards • Holding students accountable • Pushing students to reach their potential	***Preparing students for short and long term success***
			• Addressing individual students' needs • Modeling • Consulting with students on their progress	***Engaging students as active participants in their own learning.***

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